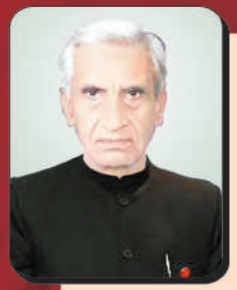


About the Book

These short stories of Dr. Brahma Dutta Sharma give us an insight into the ways human beings, especially Indians, behave in their day-to-day life. They bring to light the fact that often people complain when there is no reason to complain and people do not quarrel when there are weighty reasons to quarrel. They reveal that often petty slips, miscalculations, and jests cause serious consequences, nay even deaths.

About the Author

Professor Brahma Dutta Sharma, the writer of these short stories, has been working as Professor of English at the Turba Campus of Taiz University in the Republic of Yemen since 2008. For about eleven years he worked as Professor and Head, Department of English, Kumaun University Nainital in India. During this period he was also the Director of the D.S. B. Campus of the University for about five years. Dr. Sharma is a D. Lit. of Meerut University (*now* Chaudhary Charan Singh University) Meerut. He was awarded the degree of Ph.D. on his thesis on the American novelist John Updike and the degree of D. Lit on his thesis on the Beat Writers. Dr. Sharma has authored five books: one on John Updike, another on the Beat writers, yet another on the contemporary Indian English novelists (co-author Dr. Susheel Kumar Sharma), the fourth on the British authors and the fifth on the American authors. He is the author of seventy research articles covering a wide range on authors including Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Emily Dickinson, Bernard Shaw, Alexander Pope, Tulsidas, Keshav Das, Amritlal Nagar, Laxmi Narain Mishra, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar and Mahadevi Verma.

Dr. Sharma was born in the district of Bulandshahr in the state of Uttar Pradesh. But he has chosen to become a permanent resident of Hapur. He writes poems and short stories in both English and Hindi and some of them have been published in magazines and anthologies. Two short collections of his poems are *The Dancing Straws* and *Neerav Kone se*.

Shalabh Publishing House
249/5 Shastri Nagar, Meerut -250 004
Ph. (0121) 2761797, M: +91-946830202
Email: <shalabhgupta1951@gmail.com>

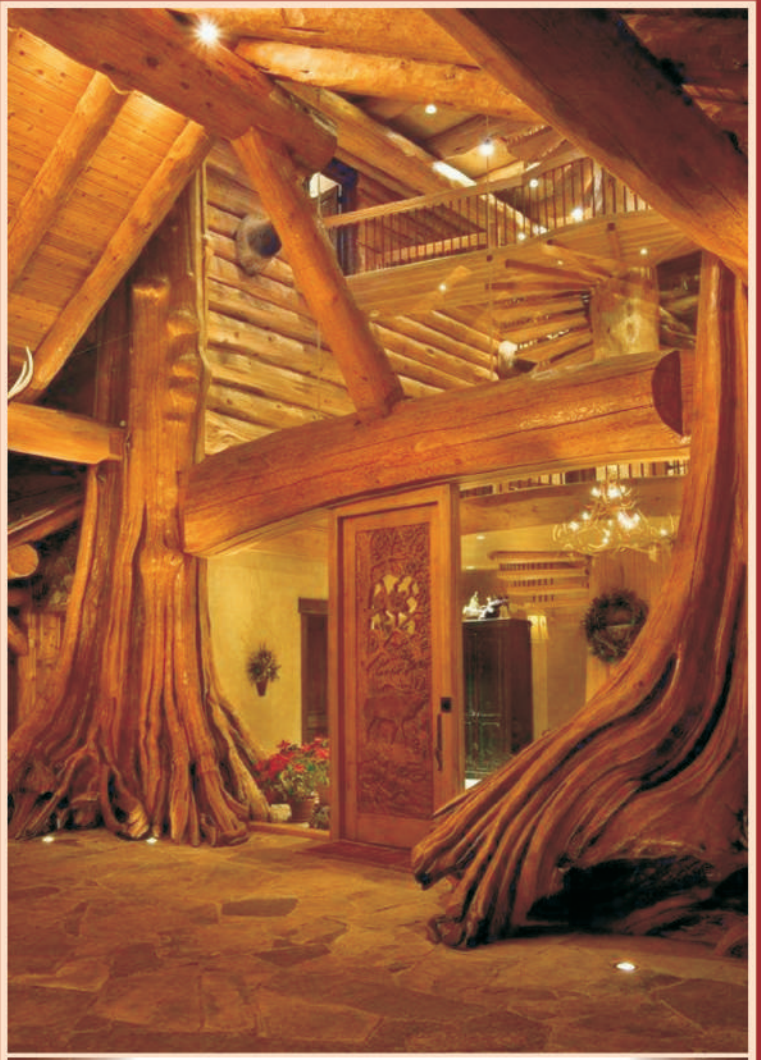
New Delhi Address:
4378/4B, 401 JMD House
Ansari Road, Daryaganj
New Delhi 110 002

ISBN: 978-81-88681-24-2
978-81-88681-24-2

₹200.00 • US $ 12.00

A Partition & Other Stories — Brahma Dutta Sharma — Shalabh

A Partition & Other Stories



Brahma Dutta Sharma

A Partition and Other Stories

Brahma Dutta Sharma
Professor of English
Faculties of Education, Science and Arts
Turba Campus, Taiz University
Republic of Yemen

Shalabh Publishing House
Meerut • New Delhi

Published by:

Shalabh Publishing House
249/5 Shastri Nagar
Meerut -250 004
Ph. (0121) 2761797, M: +91-946830202
Email: <shalabhgupta1951@gmail.com>
New Delhi Address:
4378/4B, 401 JMD House
Ansari Road, Daryaganj
New Delhi 110 002

A PARTITION AND OTHER STORIES

©Author
Edition: 2014
ISBN: 978-81-88681-24-2
Price: ₹ 200.00
US $ 12.00

The author asserts his moral right to be identified as the author and the copyright owner of this book. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by photocopying or by electronic or mechanical means for pecuniary benefits.

Printed in India

Published by Shalabh Gupta for Shalabh Publishing House

Letter Graphics:
Varuna Printers & Stationers and Printed at Varuna Printers, Allahabad

CONTENTS

Preface 4
1. A Partition 5
2. A Cheat in Manager's Clothing 8
3. A Doctor without Imagination 13
4. A Fall? Yes, It Was a Fall 15
5. A Narrow Escape 22
6. A Soft Target 28
7. An Unwanted Guest 33
8. Back to My Communist Days 35
9. But They Wanted More 38
10. Five Sons: A Cursed Family 41
11. God Heard My Prayer 46
12. God's Will Was Done 49
13. He Lost His Life in The Prime Of His Youth 53
14. His Love of Death 58
15. His Declaration of His Independence 60
16. Hobson's Choice 64
17. How My Cough Became Irremediable 69
18. How We Lost Our Land 72
19. I Regained My Purse 78
20. I Trusted Them and Lost Two Hundred Rupees 81
21. I Was Hurt 85
22. Ill-Placed Loyalties 88
23. Is Bread Alone Not Enough? 91
24. Just a Sari and a Ring 93
25. Milk Healed Him 95
26. Not His Father Any More 97
27. Our Pilgrimage to Shri Awantika Ji 100
28. Reimbursement 104
29. The Havoc That A Monkey Caused 107
30. The Price I Had to Pay to Get My Book Back 110
31. The Treatment I Chose to Undergo 113
32. Three Sons: Three Ways 118
33. Was It Rigidity? Or Honesty? 121
34. Was My Money Not Hard-Earned? 124
35. Will the Twain Ever Meet 126

PREFACE

Man is a strange being as he finds causes to complain when there exists none, and keeps mum when he should shout. I have spent about seventy years in this world but I have yet to meet a wealthy man contented with his lot. On the other hand I have seen paupers laughing. I have seen people quarrelling for petty things and then I feel like saying that man is a quarrelling animal. I wonder whether man will ever have self-respect enough not to ask for more than what belongs to him and not to fight for what is not his. The fact pinches your heart and you feel like snubbing people into coming to hold that one who has no self-respect is not a human being in the real sense of the word.

Feelings like these have made me write some short stories in English and Hindi. I have included some of those stories of mine in this volume. If they enable my readers to understand human beings and their ways I will congratulate myself on having written them.

These short stories of mine have been written in simple English so that those who have learnt English as a second language feel no problem in reading them. Moreover, they are the stories which a man can read even with his daughter without any hesitation.

Brahma Dutta Sharma
Alankar, 20 Navjyoti Colony
Minakshi Road, Hapur 245101
INDIA
<sharmaprofbd@yahoo.co.in>

A PARTITION

In my boyhood days I had heard from my mother many a folk tale in which the eldest brother cunningly grabbed all the property that his father had left at the time of his death and, thus, cheated his younger brothers of their shares. This aroused in me a feeling of disgust for the ways of the eldest brothers and I resolved not to let my younger brothers have a cause to have any such grievance against me. After all I too was the eldest son of my parents and I had two younger brothers. I was determined never to behave like the eldest brother of these stories. Why should one sacrifice one's honesty and brotherly affection for money? What is money, after all? It is only the fruit of one's labour and an able-bodied man should always be willing to work. Why should one desire another man's money so long as one can work, and so long as work is available in the employment market?

So when father resolved to sell his property and informed me of the date on which he was going to shift to Haripur where I was living, I wrote letters instructing both Ramchandra and Pramod to go to Murshidabad on the day. I did that with the purpose that they might get from father whatever they wanted to claim as their shares in the property. I resolved that I would not be present on the occasion so that both of them might be absolutely free to claim as theirs whatever they wanted to and get from father all that they desired to.

Ramchandra had been living at Mohininagar for several years and had made himself independent long before. Nay, he had tried many times, though unsuccessfully, to sever his relations with father. He had tried to assert that he was no more a 'nobody' in the family. Rather he had started treating every other person as a 'nobody'. He had asserted a number of times that he had been earning a lot. I was told he had carried most of his belongings to Mohininagar soon after he had shifted to that town. However, on the appointed day he was in Murshidabad in accordance with my instructions.

Pramod had been married only a few months before. Though he had been living in Maya City, much of what had been given to him by his in-laws was still with father. So it was natural for him to reach Murshidabad

on the day father was going to shift to Haripur. Pramod hired a truck and loaded in it whatever he believed to be his. And he took his belongings to Maya City. He was good enough to carry in his truck father's belongings too and left them, as father desired, at my residence in Haripur.

When I came home in the evening at Haripur that day and saw father's furniture lying at the mouth of my street, I inferred that the process of partition had been completed and felt that there was no possibility of either of my brothers to have even the slightest reason to have a complaint against me. If there was anybody who could make a complaint regarding this partition it was I as the partition of the property had been done in my absence. I was happy I had kept myself completely uninvolved like a lotus leaf which remains undrenched even when it is stationed in water. I was also happy because the whole exercise had been completed in the presence of our parents. What could have been more transparent than this? I had kept myself more than thirty-five miles away from the spot where the property had been partitioned. If the situation had taken a different turn, our house could have become the battlefield of Kurukshetra. I believed everybody would appreciate the way I had behaved on the occasion. I expected at least my parents to say that I had acted wisely. I did not try even to find out what had been given to which brother of mine. I did not want to know it. What else could I do in order to be fair to my brothers?

In spite of my silence about this partition there began its post mortem. One day father told me that Pramod had not left for his parents to use even a hanger, not to speak of a shirt. Father also told me that he was feeling guilty for his having given to Ramchandra a few years ago what he had received from his other sons.

I shall have to use the word 'yet' at this point. 'Yet' is a dangerous word to use. I wish had I finished the story here without using this word. But we have to recognize the reality of the situation. I am being compelled to use the word and also to continue the story.

Yet there were grave grievances. They reached me through unacknowledged postmen and, then, through the participants themselves.

Pramod's mother-in-law was reported to have told a relative of hers, “We had to give our Sanju all the kitchenware once again; whatever we had given to her at the time of marriage was gulped down by Pramod's eldest brother.”

Nay, one day Pramod himself said to me, "You are dishonest. A day will come when there will crawl in your flesh one inch long worms!" Ram Chandra did not lag behind Pramod in charging me with dishonesty and his statements reached me through a number of sources. I would like to mention a few of these sources.

A son of one of my maternal uncles informed me one day, "Ramchandra says that you have given him nothing from the family possessions and that everything has been gulped down by you."

One of our maternal uncles came to me one day. He was accompanied by a friend of his. They stayed with us for several days. One day this maternal uncle of mine told me, "Your brothers say they were given nothing at the time of partition." I told him that when father left Murshidabad I did not even go there and I asked both Ramchandra and Pramod to go to Murshidabad and to collect from there whatever belonged to them. What else could I do?" On hearing this, my maternal uncle became silent but his companion said, "One-sided version is as sweet as jiggery.

Nay, one day in the presence of mother Ramchandra asked me a few days after father had expired, "Art thou not dishonest?"

I fail to understand why I had to hear all these bitter remarks. Nobody was talking of my sacrifice. After all I too had my belongings. Why had they been forgotten altogether? I feel it was to console people like me that Tulsidas wrote in Hindi:

"Loss and profit, birth and death, fame and notoriety are in the hands of the Creator."

✠✠✠

A CHEAT IN MANAGER'S CLOTHING

He was white complexioned. To be precise, his complexion gave the impression that his blood was a mixture of the Chinese and the Saxon bloods. But he was living neither in China, nor in Germany: he was living in Yemen at the moment. He was the Manager of the Public Relations Department of the University of Ismaelpur. I shall call him Abdul Fassah.

Abdul Fassah spoke Arabic fluently. But he knew little English. So I was not able to interact with him directly. I had to use a translator. I had gone to him to get letters for the Work Permit Officer and the Passport Officer to the effect that as I had joined the University as a Professor of English I be accorded the work permit and the residence visa for a year. This was my first job in a foreign country and I was not familiar with the formalities which the foreign professors had to observe and the permissions they were expected to seek. I also found that it was very difficult to find an English-speaking person in the offices and the streets in that city; finding a Hindi-speaking person appeared to be crying for the moon. And I knew very little Arabic. No doubt, I had learnt the Arabic script when I studied Urdu at the age of five, but by this time very little of that had been left in my memory.

Moreover, I had been told that the Work Permit Officer harassed the applicants a great deal. I had also been told that the people in the Passport Office charged from applicants not only the prescribed visa fee but also facility money for their own pockets. Since I did not know which office was located where in the town, as I had no knowledge of the geography of Ismaelpur, and it was not possible to seek the help of people in the streets, as it was only by a stroke of luck that you met somebody knowing English, I wanted somebody in the University office to go to these offices on my behalf and get the work permit and the residence visa for me and charge a reasonable amount of money from me for the work. As a matter of fact in many offices in India they make arrangements of this kind free. Even in Yemen there is many an organization which entrusts this work to some official working with it so that the newly arrived foreign employees may escape the trouble of going to unknown localities in the town and encountering problems of the language-barrier and the like. Some

compatriots of mine in the university were there to guide me, no doubt, but they too had found the whole business very troublesome and unpleasant.

So when Abdul Fassah said that he would get me my work permit the next Saturday provided I gave him all the documents and the prescribed fees, I felt happy and instantly gave him both money and all the relevant documents of mine including my passport. Fassah, as Sameer told me, had informed Sameer that he was doing this work of mine because our Dean Dr. Hassan was his intimate friend. He even showed to us the documents of some other foreign teachers and said that he would send all those documents to the Work Permit Office on Saturday and the teachers would get their permits on Sunday. At that time I was not alone in his office: I was accompanied by Dwivedi ji besides Sameer. Sameer assured me that Fassah was a man from a cultured family and there was no reason for me to distrust him.

Dr. Dwivedi clearly expressed his disapproval of what I was doing and asked me, Sameer and Fassah many questions which suggested that he was not willing to trust Fassah, but I ignored all his objections and ruled out all his arguments. Nay, I even borrowed some dollars from a friend and gave the full sum to Fassah. I felt I was more fortunate than my fellow teachers from India as here I had been able to get a man who would get things done in the way in which they were expected to be done in a decent organization. I also regarded myself to be a prudent man as I was going to get my work permit in a couple of days without undergoing the hardships Dr. Dwivedi and Dr. Jeet had undergone. I assured myself that perhaps Fassah had been entrusted with this work by the authorities of the University, even though he was trying to give the impression that he was a man of helping nature so that I might feel obliged to him. I felt he had some friend of his in the Work Permit Office and through him he was going to get everything done exactly as he had promised. The total amount I paid to him was fourteen thousand and five hundred Rials. This amount covered the fee for the work permit as well as the fee for the medical examination.

I expected Sameer to collect my work permit from Fassah and to hand it over to me on Monday or Tuesday. But he did not say anything to me in this regard when we met in the university on Tuesday. Even one more week was over, but Sameer did not even talk of any of these things. I was posted at Tora and I had been provided a flat there. Ismaelpur was about sixty miles from there. Sameer lived in Ismaelpur though he too was posted at Tora. So, when we met the next week I asked Sameer if he

would go to Fassah and collect my work permit. He said he would be going to Fassah's office the next week. But when the week was over, he told me he had not been able to go there the previous week but he would be going there the next week. This is how another week was gone. The next week I phoned to Sameer when he was still in Ismaelpur that I would teach his class and that instead of coming to the university he should go to Fassah's office to collect my documents. He said he would and I took his class that day. However, when he came to the university the next week, he said that Fassah was waiting for the documents of some other professors and would send all of them together as soon as he got them. The next week Fassah was reported to have fallen ill. Dr. Dwivedi happened to go to Ismaelpur one day next week but Fassah had absented himself from his duty that day and some lady told Dr. Dwivedi that Fassah was still waiting for the papers of some other foreign professors.

The next week Sameer told me that Fassah had sent all the papers to the Work Permit Office but the permits had not yet come from there. Now I began to feel that all was not well and that Fassah had been telling lies. So when I was free on the next Wednesday, I went to Ismaelpur to know what the facts were. First I went to the Work Permit Office and asked the person concerned there whether my documents had been sent to him by the university. He told me that he had no papers pending with him and that he had issued work permits to all the applicants whose documents he had received.

I went to Fassah straight and asked him to give me my passport and the other documents instantly. He asked me to give him one more day to get the work done. But I said I was already late and would be required to pay a lot of money as penalty for being late in applying for residence visa. Fassah asked me to sit down and wait for five minutes. I did sit down but I let him know that he had caused me a lot of inconvenience by telling so many lies. Fassah called his assistant and asked him to give me my papers. And he did. But he gave me only my papers, not the money. I too did not mention money that day. I took the papers and left his office hurriedly.

It took me two days to get the work permit from the Work Permit Office. When I reached the Passport Office I was told that I was more than a month late and that I would have to pay a penalty of eighteen thousand Rials.

"How much money?" asked I.

"Eighteen thousand Rials", said the Finance Officer.

And I paid the money. The man who wrote my details in the register

sent me to the Security Officer to get his signature on the back of my photograph. For this signature he charged three thousand Rials. The man with the register did not do anything until I had paid him five hundred Rials. However, I got the residence visa as soon as I had made all these legal and illegal payments.

I narrated the whole story of Fassah to Sameer and asked him whether a man from a cultured family was expected to behave like that. Sameer told me that he had asked Fassah to refund my money but he had refused to give it to Sameer. Sameer believed Fassah would refund it to me. The next week I went to Fassah to request him to refund me my money. He said he would refund it when he got it back from Sabri and that Sabri was not available that day. When I went to him another day, he had some other excuse ready. I phoned to him one day that I was coming to Ismaelpur the next day, but Fassah said he was in Sana'a and would not be available that week. Many days passed like that. And days soon became weeks and weeks became months. And my money was still there in Fassah's pocket. Sameer too seemed to be ineffective and, consequently, of no help. What to do now?

At last I decided to report the matter to Professor Sylvan, the Vice Rector of the university. I knew it was not the duty of the Vice Rector to intervene in such matters, but my informing him would put Fassah in an embarrassing situation and would be a kind of arm-twisting. Sameer too reluctantly agreed to give his consent to this step of mine. As a matter of fact it was Sameer's moral duty to pressurize Fassah to pay my money to me. After all it was at his advice that I had given money to Fassah and it was Sameer who had certified that Fassah was a man from a cultured family and was trust-worthy.

At this stage in a state of helplessness I decided to lodge a complaint with Vice Rector. I told Professor Sylvan, the Vice Rector that I was facing a very strange problem. Professor Sylvan asked me what the strange problem was. I told him how Abdul Fassah had taken from me money to pay for my work permit, but he had neither taken the work permit nor returned me my money. Dr. Sylvan asked me whether I myself had made the payment. And when I told him that I myself had done that he went to Fassah's room himself. But since Fassah was not available there he called Fassah's assistant and translated my complaint into Arabic. When I went to the university office the next time, Professor Sylvan came to me the moment he saw me there and told me that Fassah would give me my money back that day. But Fassah was not available in his office. I waited for Fassah to come to his office, but he did not and that

day too I had to come empty-handed. The next week I again phoned to Fassah that I would be coming to Ismaelpur the next day and he said he would be available in the university office. Dr. Dwivedi too was with me and he too asked Fassah to refund me my money. Fassah must have found himself in a sort of tight corner consequently. He made me wait for about half an hour and then gave me ten thousand Rials. The rest of the money he has not given me to this day, the 22nd of February 2012 in spite of several requests of mine. I had given him this money in December 2008. Professor Sylvan was replaced by Professor Sabri soon after Fassah had paid me 10,000 Rials. So it was not possible for me to approach Professor Sylvan again. So I resolved to regard the chapter as closed and the rest of my money in Fassah's pocket has become a part of Fassah's property.

✠✠✠

A DOCTOR WITHOUT IMAGINATION

The incident occurred in 1967 (if I correctly remember). And it occurred at Hapur, a town not far away from Delhi. In this town of Hapur there used to be a locality named Raghuvirganj near the Tehsil cross-roads. This locality was populated largely by the Sikhs most of whom had migrated into India from Pakistan around the fifteenth of August 1947. On the southern side of the Tehsil cross-roads there was a clinic of a doctor whom people called the Delhi-*wala* doctor perhaps because his family lived in Delhi and he commuted to Hapur daily.

One day a child in this locality of Raghuvirganj happened to put into his mouth an iron nail and by the time the parents' attention was drawn to it and something could be done to take it out, the child had swallowed it up. The child's father took his son to the clinic of the Delhi-*wala* doctor as it was the nearest clinic available and requested the doctor to do the needful at the earliest.

The doctor thought over the problem and said to the patient's father that he would proceed in a very cautious way.

"If the piece of iron swallowed up by the boy had been shaped like a pill, there would have been no cause of any worry, as a round object would have rolled down and would have moved out of the body in a day or two. But it is a nail. And a nail has a point at one of its ends. This is a cause of worry. While moving through the food-pipe and the intestines, this nail may get stuck somewhere and its point may pierce into the wall of the pipe. If that happens, its point may make a cut in the wall of the pipe and the wound caused by it may turn septic. If that happens that will be a very serious development and may even cause the child's death. That is why I would like it not to move at all and to stay wherever it has reached," said the doctor.

The patient's father was much impressed to hear all this. He was all praise for the doctor's precautions.

"Sardar ji, I would like to administer a medicine that will dissolve the piece of iron and the dissolved form of iron will slip down the pipe quite easily without causing any cut anywhere" added he.

The patient's father was happy to note all this. And he readily agreed with the doctor. He felt that the doctor was trying to find the safest solution.

'But which medicine can dissolve the piece of iron?' the doctor asked himself. And he got the answer. He administered a dose of sulphuric acid to dissolve the piece of iron.

A dose of sulphuric acid! It was administered. The doctor was not able to imagine that before reaching the nail, the chemical would burn the lips, the tongue, the walls of the pipe, and what not.

Within seconds the child's lips were swollen several times their original size and the child was extraordinarily restless. Soon the child found it difficult even to breathe. Sardarji then rushed to Dr. Phool Chand Maheshwari's clinic.

Dr. Maheshwari heard whatever sardar ji said and examined the patient. He declared the patient “brought dead.” However, he also x-rayed the patient's stomach and said, “The nail has reached the right point and if nothing at all had been done, it would have gone out with the stool unimpaired definitely by tomorrow.”

The child's father and his friends were furious to see the child's dead body. Some of them took their swords and ran towards the Delhi-*wala* doctor's clinic. But the doctor had already left for Delhi.

✠✠✠

A FALL? YES, IT WAS A FALL

It was the summer of 1961. My student life was over and I was looking for a job. As I had earned the requisite qualifications for a teaching job I started attending interviews for the posts of teachers. In most institutions they were in need of teachers of Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Zoology, and Botany and in most cases the vacancies remained unfilled. If there was one vacancy of a teacher of English, there were dozens of applications. This phenomenon made me convince myself that if I had had a degree in Science. I would have been able to get a teaching job quite easily. But I had a degree in Arts with English as one of my subjects. The number of the vacancies of the teachers of English was not large. And the condition in the other subjects of Humanities was still worse.

In the summer of 1963 my maternal uncle Rishipal paid us a visit. He was curious to know what I and my brothers were doing. I told him I was doing M.A. English while both my brothers had appeared at the Intermediate (Arts) examination. He said that the days of Humanities were over and it was essential to study some Science subject in order to get a good job. This had been my finding too during the days I had been searching for a job for myself, as I have already mentioned. So every word of his reached the core of my heart and I resolved to accept his advice. Since I had reached M.A. final, nothing could be done at that stage for the betterment of my lot. However, since my younger brothers had not reached the University level by that time they could be asked to study Sciences.

Of my younger brothers Chandu was believed to be a non-serious student and that he actually was. And he was incorrigible. So we decided to leave him to his fate. Pramod was doing well. So we turned our attention to him. It was resolved that he be asked to shift to Sciences from Arts and to repeat his Intermediate. We believed he would study the course of the Intermediate class within a year. Pramod did not say "No".

So as soon as the month of July arrived Pramod was sent to Anoopshahar to seek admission in the Science section there. First he offered Physics and Chemistry, but since there was some technical difficulty he shifted to Zoology, Botany, and Chemistry. However, he did

not find any of these Sciences easy and interesting. He had to study them, no doubt, but he felt he was being made to do something against his liking. Whenever I paid him a visit I found him sleeping. He tried to come back home every weekend. All this indicated that he was finding his studies uninteresting. I expected him to complete the course in one year, but he took two years to do that. The first year he was at Anoopshahar, the second year he was sent to Khurja. Then he was sent to Meerut to join the B.Sc. class. It was a two year course, but he took three years to complete it. For M. Sc. he came to Harinagar Post-graduate College in which I was working as a Lecturer in the Department of English.

When Pramod was a student of M.Sc. Chemistry I tried to persuade him to do his work with greater devotion so that he was able to secure first division. I told him that if he was able to get first division he might get the post of a lecturer in a Degree college. By that time there were so many first class Science post-graduates in the employment market that it was almost impossible for a second class post-graduate to get appointed lecturer in a degree college. I wanted Pramod to get at least as high a post as I was holding.

"A degree college lecturer is considered to be a member of the highest class in the Indian society. People call him a professor even when he is a lecturer. The easiest way to rise in our society is one of getting the post of a degree college lecturer. Otherwise you have to have at least 500 bighas of land. Becoming the owners of so much land is impossible for us. But getting the post of a degree college lecturer is not that difficult. It can be done by devoting oneself whole-heartedly to one's studies during one's student days," said I.

"An Intermediate college lecturer is much better than a degree college lecturer as the former is able to earn a lot of money by giving tuitions while a degree college lecturer is denied this privilege," said Pramod

"Giving tuitions is not a privilege; it is a low kind of work. One should not stoop to that level. One should devote one's extra time to reading. The rewards of reading are much more valuable than the rewards of earning extra money," said I.

"It is money that decides the status and value of a man in the Indian society. In this society of ours nobody takes your knowledge or scholarship into consideration. If you are not rich, you are nothing in their eyes. If one has money, one gets respect, power and even

connections and nobody worries about what the source of your money is or has been. Moreover, what is low in giving tuitions? It is not a foul means to earn. If a teacher teaches students at home, he makes good use of his time and energy and also enriches himself. What is wrong, after all, with giving tuitions?" asked Pramod.

I did not argue further. This much had made it clear to me that he was not going to do anything more than what he had been doing and was content with his modest achievement. Sometimes I wonder whether he would have become more industrious if I had given some other more convincing arguments. However, at that time I was not able to think of any other argument and resolved to remain silent for the moment. I felt a little annoyed but did not express my annoyance. However, this had become clear to me that Pramod was not going to get first division and as a second division M.Sc. he was not going to get a good job. And when the university declared the result of the examination we found that Pramod had actually been placed in the second division. I said to myself, "God's will has been done."

By that time the conditions in the employment market for candidates seeking teaching jobs had worsened considerably. I did not know how Pramod would be able to get a job in that situation. However, Pramod was able to get appointed as lecturer in Chemistry in an Intermediate college. But this college was located in a village where students either had no money to take tuitions or did not like to spend money on taking tuitions. And the management of this college was not decent enough to pay salary as per the government approved scale to all the teachers. Consequently, Pramod found that his pay-packet was quite thin. Thus, he was not happy even though he had become a lecturer in an Intermediate college as he wished to and had revealed to me. But since I did not help him in getting another job he was unhappy with me and reported to father that I was not helping him adequately. If he had realized that his not having obtained first division was responsible for his not having been able to get a good job, he would have been very close to truth. The fact of the matter was that I had made a few efforts to get Pramod appointed but those efforts had borne no fruit. I was feeling helpless though I was still making efforts.

In the mean time Pramod got married. Now he wanted his wife also to get a job. I tried to explore the possibilities of her getting a job at Harisingh Nagar. But this time also my efforts bore no fruit. Pramod's in-laws, however, succeeded in finding jobs for both Pramod and his wife

Meena at Khatauli. They started working in the institutions run by the same management: she was teaching in a girls' school while he was a Chemistry lecturer in an intermediate college for boys. But Pramod's pay-packet was still as thin as it was earlier.

I wanted Pramod to get a job in which he was able to make use of his knowledge of Chemistry and also to get money enough to live comfortably. After all he had acquired the Master's degree in that subject. There were only two jobs of the kind so far as my knowledge at that time went: the job of a Chemistry lecturer and the job of a scientist. Since he was working as a Chemistry lecturer I was not unhappy as here at least he was making use of his knowledge of Chemistry. But the consideration of money was not insignificant. Pramod's father-in-law wanted him to compete for the Provincial Civil Service posts. But I did not like the idea as there Pramod's knowledge of Chemistry was going to serve no purpose. I thought and thought but all that was fruitless.

The wheels of time, however, were running fast and soon impatience replaced patience in father's heart and he asked me to seek the help of Pramod's father-in-law in getting him recruited in the office of the Controller of Defence Accounts. I knew this was a bad decision. But in the state of helplessness and impatience I accepted father's advice and wrote to Pramod's father-in-law to get Pramod recruited in the CDA office. It was a blunder on my part that I wrote a letter to that effect to Pramod's father-in-law. But I said to myself that it was going to be a temporary arrangement and that soon I would be able to recall Pramod to work as a lecturer on the government approved salary.

Chandraji sent his son Buddha Prakash to me to discuss the matter. Perhaps Chandra ji and Buddha Prakash too felt that I had taken a wrong decision, but they did not express any opinion about it. Buddha Prakash said that in the office of the CDA they recruited only clerks. So the only post that Pramod was in a position to get there was the post of an Upper Division Clerk, or that of an Auditor, as they liked to describe it there.

"Since Pramod's present salary is less than that of an auditor, he is not happy here. As an auditor he will be getting a little more, at least," said I.

"O.K." said Buddha Prakash, though his face gave the impression that he would have liked Pramod to continue as a lecturer.

And soon Pramod joined the CDA as an auditor. I felt guilty that I had pushed Pramod from a lecturer's chair into a clerical job. This post

one could get even after doing B. A. Pramod had devoted seven years of his life to studying Sciences. Obviously those seven years were going waste. My conscience upbraided me constantly and I was not able to silence it whatever I did. I felt that all the efforts of the family to make Pramod a scientist had gone fruitless. Likewise, all the efforts Pramod had made to study Chemistry, Botany and Zoology had gone into the waste paper basket. If I had not written that letter to Chandraji, Pramod would have continued as a Chemistry lecturer. This feeling made me make consistent efforts to enable Pramod to get a job suited to his qualification. This time my efforts bore fruit and I succeeded in getting an appointment for Pramod as a lecturer on full scale. I thanked God and decided to call Pramod back to teaching.

I went to Meerut and broke the news to Pramod. I said God had blessed us and had done what I had been praying for. Pramod heard me but instead of being happy at the news asked me what he would do to his job in the CDA office. I said he could take leave without pay for six months in case he did not like to resign instantly. He said, "Ask Babu ji." By "Babu ji" he meant his father-in-law Shri Chandra ji. I remained calm and went to Chandra ji. Chandra ji said, "It is for you to decide. But if once Pramod leaves this office, re-entry is very difficult. So think carefully." I came back empty handed. I had overcome all the external obstacles and had cleared the road completely for Pramod to run along, but what could be done when Pramod himself was not willing to make use of the opportunity? I had opened a sky for him to fly up into. But what could be done when Pramod himself was not willing to leave the ground. What is not destined to happen cannot be made to happen. What I had regarded as a temporary arrangement was being treated by Pramod as the final one.

When Pramod and I met after a week or so at Murshidabad I asked my parents why Pramod wanted to remain a clerk and why he had not agreed to raise himself to the post of a lecturer. They said they were trying to persuade him to join his new college. But Pramod said he would prefer a government job to a private one. He added that he was a better-paid person in the CDA office.

"But you are only a clerk there. In the college you will work as a lecturer and will get full scale. Lecturership in an Intermediate college is a thousand times better than a clerical post," said I.

"But my present job is pensionable. If I continue here, I will be free from financial problems throughout my life. A private job is a private job.

An employer's mood can change without any notice," said Pramod.

"But here you are only a clerk. What is the use of your having done M.Sc. Chemistry? You would have gained this job even after doing B.A. Why did we spend so much money on your education?" asked I.

"What is the objection if he chooses to remain here?" This question was asked by Meena, Pramod's wife.

The tug of war continued for a week or so. I was of the opinion that I was 100% right while Pramod was 100% wrong. I believed that I was trying to raise his status while he was trying to keep himself low. I also believed I was trying to raise him intellectually too while he was trying to keep himself where there was no room for intellectual development. I wondered why Pramod was not reasonable in his approach and why he did not see reason in what I was saying. I knew that since both Chandra ji and Meena also wanted him to remain a CDA employee, I was going to lose. What is destined to happen must happen! But I argued still.

This is how Pramod betrayed his parents, his teachers and his subject of study. He did that perhaps because the CDA job was giving him an opportunity to settle at Meerut. Maybe there were other reasons too.

I was disturbed so much that I consulted my venerable friend Lakshmi Shankar ji as to what I could do in such a situation. I was not willing to accept defeat that easily. I felt all my labour of seven years was going to end in smoke. Lakshmi Shankar ji agreed with me, but he added, "You are doing all this only because you want your brother to lead a happy life, isn't it?"

"Yes, I am doing all this so that he may have a good status and a better salary," said I.

"The salary, the status, and the post are the means , while happiness is the end, isn't it?" said he.

"Yes, that is right," said I.

"So if your brother is satisfied here and is happy with his present lot your end has been achieved," said he.

This calmed me a little. But I still cursed myself for having written to Chandra ji the letter that has been mentioned earlier. I wished I had refrained from writing to him as I have since then.

What was able to calm me completely was a sentence of my mother who came to me after a month or so. The sentence was, "Pramod holds

the view that you wanted him to come to Harisingh Nagar so that your wife might have at her disposal his wife to cook for the family and do the other domestic chores."

This sentence was uttered by my mother about fifty years ago. But it lies branded red hot on the sheet of my memory even today. After that I never made any effort to have anything to do with Pramod. I did not invite him even to attend my daughter's marriage. I tried to rub off his name from my memory completely and stopped trying even to know where he was, what he was doing, and what post he was occupying. However, some common friends brought many pieces of information about him. I heard whatever they said, no doubt, but I was not curious to know anything about him. I was told he had built a house in the city of Meerut, he had purchased a car, and that he was fully satisfied with his lot.

When Pramod retired in the year 2006, perhaps, he was still working in the CDA office and calculating soldiers' pensions. I know that they also serve who calculate soldiers' pensions. But one who has received higher education in science must do something more worthwhile.

****

On the 11th of September 2012 Pramod told me on the phone that on the 26th of July 2012 he had met an accident which had caused fractures in three bones of one of his feet and this foot had been disjoined at the ankle. The accident, he told me, had been caused by a collision between his scooter and another man's scooter and as he had been lying on the ground a motor car had crushed his foot under its wheels. His foot had been operated upon and they had inserted a rod in order to make the ankle and the foot functional. Pramod told me he was still confined to bed and was able to move a few steps with the help of a walker. He was still far from recovery. Pramod told me that this leg of his had become very thin and that blisters had been caused by the plaster on his foot. Pramod said he was under the treatment of the best surgeon of Meerut and he was being helped by his in-laws and his numerous friends as his circle of friends was very large. He added he was spending a lot of money on medicines but he cared a naught for money as he had it in plenty.

✠✠✠

A NARROW ESCAPE

Soon after the Emergency had been lifted in 1977, general elections were ordered, political activities started in their full swing, elections were held and Mrs Indira Gandhi's Congress Party lost power to the Janata Party. Morarji Desai became Prime Minister of India, and Chaudhary Charan Singh became Home Minister. The Family Planning programme was withdrawn and a new ministry called the Ministry of Family Welfare was created. People heaved a sigh of relief: the period of dictatorial tendencies was over.

And in the college of Harinagar, where I taught then, the students were permitted to elect the office bearers of their union after a gap of about five years. A number of student leaders appeared on the political horizon of the college. They included Darshan Singh, Yogendra Pal Singh, Surendra Pal Singh, Narendra Singh, Tomar, and Sahansar Pal Singh. The students of the college were assured by almost each of these student leaders that they would see to it that their demands were fully accepted and the examinations were conducted in the way they wanted them to be conducted. In other words almost each of them had assured the students that they would be free to use manuscript slips, note books, and even books in the examination rooms.

The teachers of the college, however, were not fully aware of the changed situation and started conducting the examination in accordance with the rules of the University. They knew that the University of Mayarashtra did not allow students to make use of books and note-books in the examination-rooms and whoever was found indulging in cheating was to be booked in accordance with the rules of the University. There was a time when a student booked in a case of cheating did not do much against the invigilator. But this year the students jointly resisted the teachers' booking the students for using unfair means in the examination.

One day when I was on the invigilation duty in one of the examination rooms I detected a student using a slip to answer his questions. I caught him, took the slip from him and asked him to hand over his answer book to me. He requested me not to book him, but when I

said that I would be acting according to the rules of the University, he stood up and asked Yogendra Singh, a student leader, to help him. Yogendra, first, requested me not to book the boy, but when I said I was acting in accordance with the rules of the University, he asked the students to stand up and disturb the examination. Some students stood up and started snatching answer books from the examinees and tearing them into pieces. Nobody resisted their attempt. Maybe some of them were too submissive even to think of resisting them, while others liked to be regarded as their accomplices.

The next day the same tale was repeated in some other room. The third day it was repeated somewhere else. After each such incident there was called a meeting of the teaching staff by the Principal and the teachers were asked how the problem was to be solved. I suggested that the teachers should use the method of persuasion and should try to convince the students that it was in their interest that the examinations were fair and that students were correctly evaluated because the examinations were meant for that purpose. I do not know whether any of them agreed with me but the staff council did not adopt a resolution to that effect. Perhaps I had not been able to express my opinion convincingly. Somebody said that it was not possible to conduct examinations unless the police were actively helping the teaching staff of the college. At this the Principal said that he would definitely write to the District Magistrate but, he added, he was not sure whether the District Magistrate would agree to help the College. However, the teachers resolved that they had no choice but to follow the rules of the University.

However, I resolved to implement my suggestion and I started talking to the student-leaders. I made sincere efforts to persuade them that it was in their interest that the examinations were fair and a student was placed in the category he deserved. I asked Sahansar Pal Singh, for example, one day when we met in the market whether it was desirable that people having no knowledge of Medical Science became doctors in the hospitals, people knowing no engineering became engineers, and people knowing nothing about driving became drivers. He said to me that some day he would come to my residence to talk about the issue. But he never came to me thereafter.

I caught hold of Tomar one day and asked him whether there would not be a chaos in the country if the people who knew how to manage business were not made managers and those who did not have the knowledge of management were given the jobs of managers, if those

who knew nothing about weapons were appointed soldiers and those who had no knowledge of teaching methods were made teachers. He said that he agreed with me but in the conditions prevailing in the college fair examination was possible only if at least a dozen persons were shot dead.

The bitterness between the teachers and the students went on increasing and a day came when the teachers resolved that they were not going to conduct the examinations unless they were going to be provided police help.

When I went to the college the next day to do my invigilation duty, I learnt that Sahansar Pal Singh had been arrested. I felt that this step of the police was going to solve our problem and the examinations were going to be conducted in accordance with the rules of the University. I believe most of my colleagues too had this opinion and were happy with the action of the police. As a matter of fact many of us were of the opinion that the action of the police had come too late and that if it had come earlier, the situation would not have become that bad.

I went to the Control Room of the college, took from there the bundle of answer books and other papers and moved towards the room in which I had to do invigilation work. So did many other colleagues of mine. On other days about 50% examinees reached the examination rooms by 6:45 A.M. and waited for the invigilators to come, but this day hardly two or three students had reached there. I asked a student what the reason was. He told me that since Sahansar Pal Singh had been arrested the students were boycotting the examination. I remained standing in the room waiting for the examinees to turn up till 7:15 A.M. but when I saw nobody else coming, I left for the Control Room.

On my way back I met the Principal of the college Dr. Liyaquat Ali Khan. He was going towards the examination rooms perhaps to find out whether any students had turned up to take the examination. He asked me why I was coming back. I told him that the students were boycotting the examination to protest against the arrest of Sahansar Pal Singh. At this he remarked: "Sahansar Pal Singh has been arrested in a case of train robbery. We have nothing to do with his arrest. There occurred a case of train robbery on the Meerut-Khurja railway line a couple of days ago. It is in that case that this arrest has been made. If the students are boycotting the examination for that reason they will be harming only themselves, not us."

I found myself walking by his side. When he reached the gate of the

Main Hall, about a dozen students came towards him and assembled on the pavement below. Khan turned to address them.

"Boys, go to your respective examination rooms and take the examination," said he.

One of the boys said, "We shall not enter the examination rooms until Sahansar Pal Singh too is brought here to take the examination."

"Sahansar Pal Singh too has been permitted to take the examination. An invigilator has gone to the police station with an answer-book and a question paper to arrange his examination. Sahansar Pal Singh will take the examination in the police lock-up itself," said Dr. Khan.

"How can he take the examination like that? He was not allowed to make any preparation for it," said another boy.

"There he was given all the facilities for preparation. All the books he asked for were made available to him. So that is not a problem," said Dr. Khan.

At this Yogendra Singh said, "We shall take the examination only when Sahansar Pal Singh comes here and sits in the examination hall like the rest of us. Until this happens no examination will be held in the college. Withdraw the complaint against him and get him released. It is this that we want."

"Sahansar Pal has been arrested in the railway robbery case. We have no authority to ask the police to release him. The law will take its own course. We cannot meddle into the affairs which are not ours," said Dr. Khan.

The boys paid little attention to Dr. Khan's logic and went away towards the playground leaving Dr. Khan still trying to say his say.

Principal Khan called a meeting of the teaching staff again to explore other possibilities and to find ways and means to hold the examination. The meeting was held in the Reading Room. One of the teachers said that it was not possible to hold examinations in the conditions prevailing in the country. Another said that some more arrests were needed. I said that a team of teachers be entrusted with the task of persuading students to agree to abide by the rules of the university. A close friend of mine said that I was living in an ivory-tower and that no solution could be found that way. Another teacher said that unless the Vice Chancellor, or rather the Chancellor, helped the Principal, examinations were not going to be held. The resolution that was adopted was that since the examination had been

boycotted by the students and since they were not willing to let the examinations in accordance with the rules of the University, the Vice Chancellor be informed of the fact and be requested to guide the college administration in the circumstances prevailing in the college.

When the teachers were discussing the issue inside the College building, the students were discussing it in the open. The meeting of the teachers ended a little before the meeting of the students did. Within five minutes of the ending of their meeting, most of the teachers left for their homes leaving behind Dr. Khan and a few of his close associates in the college. I was a little slow with the result that by the time I took my bicycle to leave for home, a number of students holding sticks in their hands came from the ground running towards the office of the Principal. I saw one student breaking a chair to get its leg. He must have done it in order to equip himself with a stick. I decided to go to help Dr. Khan and be with him at this juncture. I put my bicycle inside the staff-room of the English Department and went to the Principal's office.

Dr. Khan was standing on the verandah outside his office. I left the pavement and took my position by his side. A bearded boy wearing white kurta-pajama of hand-spun cloth came to the other side of Khan and said to the boys standing on the pavement, "Here is Dr. Khan who has got Sahansar Pal Singh arrested." Dr. Khan instantly retorted, "No, we did not get him arrested." The students started throwing pebbles at Dr. Khan. By this time Dr. Arya too had arrived there. Suresh Goyal was behind me. He advised me to leave the verandah and go inside. He asked Dr. Khan and Dr. Arya too to do that. All the three of us turned towards the door of the office. Suddenly Dr. Khan and Dr. Arya turned back and started chasing the students. Maybe they had been hit and found the injury unbearable. Some students ran towards the library, some towards the gate and the rest jumped backwards into the pit and then went up the wheat field behind the pit. Dr. Khan was chasing the students running towards the library, while Dr. Arya was chasing the students running towards the gate. I deemed it fit to come to the pavement. It was then that a big piece of stone came flying from the students standing in the wheat field and hit me on the left side of my head. I was dazed for a minute or two and felt there were dazzling stars everywhere. I should have imagined earlier that this would happen if I stood in the open on the pavement. But I had not with the result that I was hurt. When both Dr. Khan and Dr. Arya came back, all the three of us entered the office and shut the door.

Now the students started pelting stones at the windows and doors of the

building and even tried to push the door open. The bolt of the door was too weak to withstand such forceful pushes and fell on the floor just as the pieces of glass did. Now the class three and class four employees present there used manual force to keep the door closed and not to let the students enter. They used the furniture of the office to keep the door closed. It was then that I found blood trickling down from my head. Dr. Arya wiped the blood with his handkerchief. The students were trying to find entry into the building through any opening but they were able to remove neither a door, nor a window. One student was seen hitting the grill with a thick stick and a piece of the grill fell on the floor of the room with a jingling sound. However, stone-pelting was still going on. I said to Dr. Khan, "Now they can set the building on fire." And he replied, "They can do anything!"

The telephone wires had been cut by the students and it was not possible to call the police. There were no residences nearby. So there was no hope of any assistance from the neighbours. I felt we were going to be beaten to death in case some door gave way, or to be burnt alive in case the students set the building on fire. Stone-pelting was continuously going on. It was after about forty-five minutes that it took a break. Chandra Pal, then, went out of the building to telephone to the police from the Cold Storage.

It was when the police party arrived that the office-door was opened. Dr. Khan was back in his chair and then began the post mortem of the whole incident. Nayantara Sehgal too reached the college as a representative of the *Indian Express* and sent to the newspaper a report about what had happened on this day in the Haripur College. This report must have been read by readers all over the country. Several other news papers too highlighted the problem. The Hindi weekly *Dharma Yuga* too published articles highlighting this phenomenon prevailing in colleges and universities over the vast area from Gujrat to Bihar. The result was that there was a change in the government and Babu Banarsidas was sworn in Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. This brought about a sea change in the behaviour of the police. Within a week or so the police of the state became so active that they lathicharged students in almost every city of Uttar Pradesh. Within a couple of days the whole student community became submissive and examinations were held strictly in accordance with the rules of the University.

About two years later one day I read in a newspaper a news item that Sahansar Pal Singh had died in an encounter with the police a few days before.

✠✠✠

A SOFT TARGET

Gourdan Pathak was a retired peon of the University, but he was still occupying the residence which the University had provided to him for his service period. So many letters had been written to him asking him to vacate the house, but he had turned a blind eye to them. Gourdan was a far-sighted man and when he was still in service he had got Akash, one of his sons, appointed peon in the library of the university. Yet he did not care to obey the rules which caused him any inconvenience.

Since Gourdan's family was quite large he found a one-room house too small for it and extended the house by adding one room at its front, and, thus, grabbed a part of the open space which had been being used as a community-playground by the children living in the non-teaching employees' colony. Gourdan's next-door neighbour Nanuwa, with whom he usually quarrelled, naturally did not like this action of Pathak and lodged a complaint against him with me and also with the Vice Chancellor of the University. At that time I was holding the post of the Director of the Lake City Campus of the University. I sent Pathak a letter trying to persuade him that it was unbecoming on his part not to honour the rules of the University which he had served for more than two dozen years. I wrote to him that in enlarging his house he had violated a rule of the University, as he had not been given any right to make any alteration in the house provided to him by the University, and had, at the same time, violated a rule of the City Board as he had got a room constructed without getting the Board's permission. The letter was delivered to him, but instead of dismantling the room in compliance with my advice, he tore my letter off and threw it away. After all one of his sons was a bully and had become a member of a gang of the bullies of the town! This meant that the strategy of persuasion was not going to be effective in this case.

I decided to approach the Vice Chancellor to know his views in this regard. Since the authorities in the University had obliged Pathak by appointing one of his sons, I believed, Pathak would do whatever the Vice Chancellor asked him to. So I wanted the Vice Chancellor to persuade Pathak to dismantle the room in question.

Dr. Bhupesh, the then Vice Chancellor, was still in his chamber when I went to meet him in the afternoon one day. And he had with him Chandra, the Registrar of the University, and Mani, an Assistant Registrar. It was Mani who suggested to me that I should write to the Lake Development Authority and get Gourdan's construction dismantled. I listened to him quite patiently, no doubt, but I ignored the suggestion as I regarded it as a mere suggestion from a friend who was, no doubt, trying to help me in finding a solution of the problem, but who had little knowledge of the complexities of the problem. So many people gave me so many suggestions about almost every problem that cropped up. I heard all the suggestions but rarely expressed my opinion about any of them. I ignored this suggestion even when it was repeated by Registrar Chandra. I continued to regard it as a friend's suggestion which I might accept or not. I ignored it because, as I have explained earlier, I wanted to persuade Dr. Bhupesh to instruct Gourdan to dismantle the room. That was the most effective way to solve the problem in my opinion. But when Vice Chancellor Bhupesh asked me one day after a week or so whether I had written to the Lake Development Authority to get the construction dismantled, I felt that I could not ignore the suggestion altogether and that he was treating the suggestion as his order to be obeyed. But he was cautious enough not to give me anything in black and white. I told Vice Chancellor Bhupesh that I had written a letter to the Lake Development Authority.

I had actually written the letter. And I had got it typed too. But I had not dispatched it. Soon after I had written the letter, I had realized that it was unwarranted on my part to write to the director of the Lake Development Authority. I also discussed the matter with a senior friend and he too advised me not to send any letter to the Lake Development Authority.

My reasons were as follows: first, I was not the custodian of the property of the University as according to the Act of the state government it was the Registrar who had that honour; secondly, even though I was the Director of the Campus of the University, this post of the Director they had given to me was not statutary and so the Lake Development Authority could, if it so chose, ignore my letter altogether; thirdly, unauthorized constructions were there in several Departments of the University and if the Lake Development Authority decided to dismantle all the unauthorized constructions in the University, Gourdan Pathak's room was not going to be the only casualty; and fourthly, if all the unauthorized constructions were dismantled, the affected persons were

going to declare me a traitor, and to do against me all they could.

So I had written the letter to the Lake Development Authority, no doubt, but I had not let it go out of my brief-case. Nay, I also felt that it was a part of the duty of Registrar Chandra to write to the Lake Development Authority, and that both he and the Vice Chancellor were trying to use me as a tool and were playing politics with me. The Vice Chancellor was asking me to do what was not my duty and was forcing me to obey his illegal order which he had not given me even in writing and which for that reason I had been treating as a suggestion given in a personal capacity. The realization that the Vice chancellor had been playing politics with me hurt my feelings as I expected a Vice Chancellor to be a fatherly figure functioning as everybody's protector. So when Vice Chancellor Bhupesh pressurized me to write to the Lake Development Authority, as he was being pressurized by Nanuwa to do something against Gourdan Pathak, I wondered whether he deemed Gordhan Pathak a hard target. However, I decided not to do anything in the regard. And since nothing had been sent to me in writing I was expected to comply with nothing. In the eyes of law I was not at fault.

I told Dr. Bhupesh, "I have written the letter to the Lake Development Authority", but I did not tell him that I had not dispatched it. What I said to him was literally true. However, some people can, no doubt, say that I had not told my Vice Chancellor the whole truth and may not accept the justification I am giving. No doubt, I had not told him the whole truth, but I had not told him any lie. And this is how I have tried to calm my conscience.

They must have expected that battering rams were going to be used to dismantle Gourdan pathak's unauthorized room in a couple of days. But days passed and there was no indication that the Lake Development Authority was going to do anything. A week was over. Yet there was no activity. When the second week was going to end, I received from Registrar Chandra a letter asking me as to when I had sent the letter to the Lake Development Authority and what its number and date were. Now was the time for me to tell the rest of the truth the part of the truth that was still waiting to be revealed. This time I became candid. I wrote to the Registrar that as per the Statutes of the University the custodian of the property of the University was the Registrar of the University, and not the Director of the Campus, and so it was not a part of my duty to request the Lake Development Authority to dismantle the unauthorized constructions inside the University.

At about 09: 00 p.m. that day I received a phone call from Dr. Bhupesh. He said to me, “Why did you misinform me that you had written to the Lake Development Authority? I am taking a very serious view of this.” Before I was able to tell him that I had actually written the letter and that what I had told him was literally true, he disconnected the phone. I did not call back. When we met the next time after a week or so, I did not mention the phone call. Nor did he. I asked myself what action was going to be taken against me. For this 'offence' he could not terminate my services. So I consoled myself with the thought that he was only frightening me in order to tame me into unqualified obedience.

A few weeks later the accounts clerk told me that they had stopped paying me the allowance for my work as Director Campus. I asked him why they had done that. He had no explanation. I wrote to the Vice Chancellor. Dr. Singh, the then Vice Chancellor of the University, also had no explanation. Dr. Bhupesh had resigned as Vice Chancellor a few days before and had shifted to some other town bag and baggage. However, I learnt from some unauthorized sources that the auditor of the State government had objected to the University's having been paying me an allowance of Rupees five hundred per month. I met Pandey the auditor and asked him why he had objected to the University's having been paying me an allowance for the extra work I had been doing, though he had not raised any objection in the cases of my predecessors Harry and Bahadur Singh. He too had no explanation. However, he said that some people of the University itself had asked him to raise and record this objection. He did not tell me what he meant by the word 'people'. Obviously, it must have been the Vice Chancellor or the Registrar. That means either Dr. Bhupesh or Mr. Chandra. That means that Dr Bhupesh had meant business when he had told me that he was taking a very serious view of my having 'misinformed' him! And that his threat was not a mere threat. And skipping all formalities he had executed his decision. He had done nothing against Pathak. He had done nothing against Nanuwa. But he had inflicted on me a punishment without even informing me. He had deemed me a soft target!

Nay, when I retired a year or two later they charged from me even the amount which they had paid me earlier for my four-and-a-half year work as Director Campus. It was thus that I lost an amount of about Rupees thirty thousand. I had paid even income tax on this income. I wrote to the Chancellor of the University. And the Chancellor wrote to the Vice Chancellor. But all ended in a smoke.

Pathak, on the other hand, had succeeded in getting his daughter too appointed in the university. So he turned out to be a really hard target!

I went to meet Dr. Bhupesh a few weeks after I had retired. Dr. Bhupesh was 'glad' to meet me. He had undertaken some project in Bangla Desh and was helping the Government of that country in reorganizing some educational programme of theirs. His wife had started a primary school for the children of economically backward sections of the town. We talked about our days at the University. But neither of us mentioned how he had treated me as a soft target and how the university had made me refund the money that they had paid to me as an allowance for my work as Campus Director.

✠✠✠

AN UNWANTED GUEST

I am fully aware of the fact that most families in cities have to entertain unwanted guests. In most of these cases it is the house-wife who has to suffer, as it is she who has to bear the burden of cooking for the guests and doing extra work to entertain them. Usually these guests are the relatives of the husband and she does not like them at all. So I avoid going to even my near relatives. Yet there come occasions when I have to go to some of them. I would like to narrate how once I had to go to one of my relatives and had to resolve never to go to him again.

I had been invited by Mars University to be a Resource Person in a Summer Institute at Chaudhary Nagar. It was organized during the months of September and October so that the Dashahara break might be made use of and classes in the colleges remained unaffected. It was a month long institute and I decided to keep my stay there uninterrupted so that I was able to do my work at a stretch. I do not like breaks in my tasks. If there is a break in a task of mine, usually it is left uncompleted. Chaudhary Nagar is a town in which there live many relatives of mine. But I decided not to stay with any of them. I stayed in the Guest House of the University.

But some of my relatives came to know of my presence in their town and they came to meet me. One of them invited me to dine with him on the day of Dashahara and I agreed to accept the invitation. However, immediately after I had accepted the invitation I realised I had committed a mistake. But the satori had come to me late and I was not in a position to change my stand. If I had given word, I had to honour it.

On the day of Dashahara the man came to take me to his residence at the appointed time. And I accompanied him there. The dinner I had there was very well delicious. The man must have spent a lot of money on it. It was much better than the dinner that I expected to get. That indicated that the man was very happy to have me with him and to provide me dinner. When I had dined, I went to the head of the family to pay him my regards. He was an old man nearing seventy-five. He started narrating some incidents which had occurred in his life. In most of them he was comparing and contrasting his past with his present.

While narrating one of the incidents he said, “Today forty-three persons have dined in my house.” Obviously I was the forty-third person. I felt that all these forty-three persons were culprits and that I was the chief one.

✠✠✠

BACK TO MY COMMUNIST DAYS

Doctor Roop Chand was officiating as the Principal of the college in those days. I was one of the persons closely co-operating with him with all my heart. Roop Chand was a short-statured dark-complexioned man who was marked by his love for Indian culture. And in order to let people know that he loved Indian culture he used to wear the Indian dress. He was a good orator committed to what is popularly known as the saffron ideology.

One day Roop Chand told me that since there was scarcity of sugar, kerosene oil and some such other essential goods in the market and that one had to stand in long queues at the Fair Price Shops in order to buy them, it had been decided that the employees of the college should form a co-operative society so that they might get all the essential commodities and goods through it easily and at the same rates at which they were made available by the keepers of the Fair Price Shops. I said that it was a very good idea. Dr. Roop Chand said that since the population of the country had been growing by leaps and bounds and since the increase of production was not proportional to the increase of population, the problem was likely to become more and more acute thenceforth. I said I was in full agreement with him.

"It has been decided that any employee of the college can become its share-holder; a share will cost twenty rupees, and one who has purchased at least one share will become a share-holder," said Roop Chand.

"All these terms and conditions are O.K." said I.

"It has also been decided that a fourth class employee will buy at least one share, a class three employee will buy at least two shares and a teacher will buy at least three shares," said he.

"All these decisions are reasonable," said I.

"Since the rates of these commodities are decided by the government, there is no possibility of the Society's ever running into a loss. The money received from the share-holders will be deposited in the bank as a fixed deposit amount and will go on increasing as we shall be getting interest on it. Since all the share-holders are the employees of the

same organization and meet almost every day, there is no question of any office-bearer's playing false with accounts or doing any kind of manipulation," said he.

"I think you are right," said I.

"If you agree to accept these terms and conditions, please come to attend a meeting of the employees tomorrow at four o'clock in the evening. A representative of the Co-operative Department also will be coming to address the meeting and he will explain the details of the scheme, including the advantages of having an employees' co-operative society in the college and the precautions which the share-holders should take," said he.

I made a promise to attend this meeting and to buy three shares of the Society. The meeting was held as scheduled and it was unanimously resolved that the Society would be called Shri Laxmi Devi College Employees' Co-operative Society, Haripur. I bought three shares. I was happy with this step of mine. Now I was a capitalist by Dr. Roop Chand's grace and my communist days had been left behind!

We started getting sugar and kerosene oil through the Co-operative Society quite easily. All of us were happy. The Society had no employee and the whole work was being done by the employees of the College on a voluntary basis during college time. So nobody had any ground to grumble that he was devoting his time to the work of the Society

However, within about six months dark clouds began to appear on the horizon of the sky of this Society. They started saying that the salesmen of the government cheated them while weighing and did not give them sugar and oil in full quantity. And in order to compensate the loss they started charging more money than the keepers of the Fair Price Shops were charging. Unkar was the President of the Society at that time, Leem was its Secretary and Chandu was their executive officer. At this development two of the share-holders resigned and withdrew their shares. In those days I used to behave like the fire brigade of the college and tried to patch up differences between the fighting individuals and even groups. So I did not take the protest of these two share-holders seriously and tried to persuade them not to precipitate matters on trivial issues. However, they paid little heed to what I was saying and refused to withdraw their resignations.

About three months after the resignation of these two share-holders,

the office bearers of the Society declared that they had no money left with them and that unless money was arranged it would not be possible for them to buy from the government either sugar or kerosene oil. I was shocked! The Society had gone bankrupt? Where had our money gone? They had not sold anything to anybody on credit and had charged more money than the keepers of the Fair Price Shops were charging! They had paid no paisa to any employee as they had recruited none. Why were they complaining of having no money left with them?

By that time Rroop had gone on a long leave and was not to be seen anywhere in the College, if I correctly remember. Unkar advised us to demand explanation from Leem as the latter was the Secretary and was responsible for the accounts. Leem said that the whole money had been gulped by Chandu. We tried to contact Chandu but Chandu too was on leave. The Co-operative Society seemed to have disappeared without leaving a trace behind.

I am still waiting for somebody to come and return me the amount of sixty rupees, though I need no ghost to tell me that I am not going to get back my three red-coloured bank notes of twenty rupees each. My capitalist days are over and I am a communist once again.

✠✠✠

BUT THEY WANTED MORE

There arrived a cartful of men. They belonged to Lalanpur, the village of the husband of my father's younger sister. They had come to our house the first time and my father accorded them a warm welcome. My father treated everybody from Lalanpur as a Very Important Person, whether he was rich or poor, whether a Brahmin or a pariah, whether friendly or indifferent. Father not only entertained a visitor from Lalanpur, but also paid him the same regard that he would pay to the real brother of his sister's husband. The result was that we used to get a large number of guests from Lalanpur. Many of them used to come in the company of Shobharam, the husband of my father's sister, but there were many who came even by themselves.

The people I have mentioned in the former paragraph had some work in a neighbouring village but they had decided to stay at night with us. In a way this was a tribute to my father's hospitality that even the persons who had their relatives in the neighbouring villages liked to stay with my father rather than with their own relatives. And this thought gave father a great pleasure.

Our house was not very big. Nor was my father very rich. But his heart was big enough to make him warmly entertain every guest from Lalanpur. So, when on this day he had a cartful of people to provide hospitality including dinner, he had to stretch his means to some extent no doubt, but he took delight in doing so. He arranged as good dinner for them as he could.

Ours was a small village. In India the condition of villages was not very good in those days. I am talking of the days when the British were the rulers of India. The British rulers of India, naturally enough, first gratified the needs of their own countrymen and then thought of the needs of Indians. In those days ours was the village in which very few vegetables were available with the shopkeepers and it was not easy at night to go to the town and bring from there fresh vegetables. But inspite of all the constraints he arranged for his guests all the dishes he considered to be the constituents of a good meal.

These guests of my father too were happy with what they had been provided. They were all praise for every dish. And after having dined they went to their beds. But they did not go to sleep immediately and started talking about a variety of topics. After having taken his dinner my father too joined them. He wanted to get information about his sister and his brother-in-law from them as he had not heard from his brother-in-law for quite a long time.

When my father was back in his bed-room he happened to overhear the following portion of the conversation from the room of the guests:

"Why are you turning from one side to another? Aren't you feeling sleepy?" said one of the guests to a companion of his.

"He seems to be learning how to twist himself while dancing," said another and laughed boisterously.

The companion replied, "I am in the habit of drinking at least a glass of milk after dinner. Unless I get milk I feel uncomfortable and cannot go to sleep easily."

"I too have the habit of drinking milk before going to bed. But our host seems to be so stingy that he has gone to bed without caring for our needs," said the first.

"Either he should have taken proper care of us or should have told us that he was too miserly to provide us hospitality," said his companion.

"Yes, and we would have gone to stay with some other man. After all this is the village in which live the in-laws of a dozen boys of Lalanpur," said the first.

"How can this man imagine that one can go to bed without pouring a glass of milk into one's stomach to digest one's food?" said his companion.

On hearing this portion of the guests' conversation father was hurt so much that he was not able to sleep that night. He spent hours walking up and down his bed-room. Once or twice he tried to lie down, but his bed seemed to him to be a bed of thorns.

The moment father heard the first cock he went out without letting anybody know where he was going. By the time he was back, the guests had taken breakfast and were going to board their cart.

"It is too early to leave, gentlemen," said father to the guests.

"This is what I was saying to Chhattar," said one of the guests.

"Yes, this was my opinion too. After all once we leave this village, who knows, we may not get another opportunity to come over here again?" said another.

"But since we have to go, the earlier the better," said the third.

"No, no, not like this. Come and have your seats," said my father.

They accepted father's request and came back to our sitting room. Father had brought a big bucket which was quite heavy with something in it. Father took it into the house. When father came out of the house, he brought a bucketful of hot milk and a number of glasses.

"You were not able to sleep last night. I am sorry for that. I do not want you to remain awake another night. So, please, here is milk for you," said my father.

They became happy and began to drink milk. They wanted to stop drinking after each of them had drunk two glasses of milk. But my father told them that the whole bucketful of milk was meant exclusively for them. And he made them drink the whole of it.

But when he met his sister a few weeks later, he told her that in future he was not going to entertain any guest from Lalanpur barring members from her family.

✠✠✠

FIVE SONS: A CURSED FAMILY

Jeet Singh had five sons. As per the Hindu *Shastras* just one son is enough to rescue the father from the horrible abode in the hell. So for having been blessed with five sons Jeet was regarded as a very very fortunate man. Jeet was one of the two *alambardars* of the village of Lakshyapuri. He had about one hundred bighas of land in the village of Lakshyapuri and about one hundred bighas of land in the village of Peepara. Even though Jeet was a farmer he was aware of the importance of education and believed that education was essential for one's advancement in life. Nay, he also believed that it was western education that enabled a person to get a good position in the Indian society of the pre-Independence days. Those were the days when the British rulers of India were trying to implement Macaulay's policies of education in letter and spirit and those Indians who wanted their children to be highly placed naturally sent their wards to the institutions which were believed to be imparting western education in the real sense of the term.

Karwal Singh, Jeet's eldest son, appeared to be a promising boy as he took keen interest in his studies. Jeet Singh was aware of the fact that Karwal's hands were long enough to touch his knees when he was standing erect. So Jeet expected much from this son of his. Those were the days when the High School examination proved to be a stumbling block for most of the students coming from the rural areas in India, as very few students were able to cross this hurdle especially because English language was a compulsory subject. Karwal crossed this hurdle very easily. And he got through the Intermediate examination too. Jeet Singh was very happy and he resolved to send Karwal to Banaras Hindu University for higher education. Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya's efforts to build this university were still fresh in people's memory and it was an unparalleled university of India in several respects at that time. Jeet's decision to make his son join Banaras Hindu University was regarded as a genuine proof of this *alambardar's* far-sightedness. Karwal chose Philosophy as his subject of study for his post-graduate degree.

I happened to have a few glimpses of Karwal when he came home in one of the breaks. That day he was wearing a western shirt, pantaloons

and also a hat. Those were the days when most people in rural areas wore *dhoti-kurta* and covered their heads with turbans, although the Gandhi cap was fast replacing the turban. A man wearing a hat was a rare sight not only in villages but also in towns like Bulandshahr. So Karwal's hat attracted everybody's attention and became the talk of the village. However, since Karwal was an *alambardar's* son, he could not be expected to dress himself like the son of an ordinary farmer, we felt. After all he was much above the ordinary boys of the village! Some of us also believed that Banaras had anglicized Karwal. But to many Karwal's dress was shocking. Traditional Banaras was believed to be a seat of learning and made students erudite scholars of Sanskrit and lovers of simplicity, not lovers of imposing clothes. Karwal appeared to be getting education in London, not in Banaras.

When Karwal came back home in another break, he was a love-lorn soul: he had fallen in love with a fellow student of his a daughter of a deputy superintendent of police from some village near Meerut. Karwal did not know even her address but he said he would marry none but that girl from Meerut. Several other proposals were available but Karwal was not interested in any of them. Jeet would do anything to honour every wish of Karwal but in this case he appeared to be feeling helpless. However, something was to be done and Jeet Singh sent Shivram, the barber, to identify the village and the girl's father. Shivram did go to Meerut, but with so little information about the girl's address it was not easy for Shivram to locate the girl's village and to meet her father. Searching for the girl's father in the densely populated district of Meerut was just like searching for a grain of rye in a heap of chaff. Shivram came back after a week-long futile search and informed Jeet Singh that his search had borne no fruit.

When Karwal was back home in the next break, he was suffering from a serious ailment: whenever he ate or drank, his gums began to bleed. Was he suffering from pyorrhea? Karwal, however, suspected that he had been administered poisoned food at the suggestion of a teacher of his through some kitchen worker as this teacher, Karwal believed, regarded him as his rival in love. So, we felt, there were many love-lorn souls in Banaras Hindu University! Karwal said he had survived this attempt on his life, no doubt, this time, but he might not survive another. So when he went back to Banaras his maternal uncle accompanied him to cook for him there and provide him food about which there was no possibility of even a grain of suspicion.

Yet Karwal's conditioned worsened day by day. Neither the *yogasanas* nor allopathic medicines were able to cure him. Consequently, Karwal left the university and came back home for good. After a brief stay at home one day he breathed his last. Thus Karwal died unmarried and left no heir behind.

Balwant, Jeet singh's second son, was brought up more cautiously. Jeet Singh took several precautions: Balwant was kept away from big cities like Banaras; he was allowed to leave the village only after he had ceased to be single. He was sent to Meerut, a town not far from home. Meerut College Meerut used to be the most prestigious college of Western Uttar Pradesh in those days. Balwant Singh was asked to join this college to do B.A.

Balwant's wife, a girl from a neighbouring village, stayed at home even when Balwant was at Meerut. Balwant was as lean and thin as his elder brother, but Meerut made him still leaner. When his leanness was found growing day by day, he was taken to a doctor and the doctor declared that he was suffering from tuberculosis. First Balwant was treated by some allopathic doctors. Then he was treated by several *ayurvedic* doctors. But all was in vain. Balwant went on losing weight. One summer day Balwant was brought back to the village where, after a few months, he breathed his last. He too died childless and, thus, left no heir behind.

Jeet Singh took a few more precautions with respect to the education of his third son Bahadur Singh. This third son was sent to Lakhaoti, not even to Meerut. Though there was a degree college at Lakhaoti, Lakhaoti was a pure village and was free from the pollution of the cities. But Bahadur Singh turned out to be a boy with whimsical likings. He was not much interested in academic pursuits: he liked to spend most of his time at home. When he was a student of the eleventh class his mother became conscious of the intimacy that had developed between him and Balwant's wife. I am not in a position to tell you whether this intimacy had been caused by Balwant's tuberculosis or whether Balwant's tuberculosis had been caused by this intimacy. Psychologists believe both the possibilities to be equally plausible.

Jeet Singh wanted Bahadur not to remain single any more as he was a young man by that time. Some good proposals too were available. But Bahadur refused to entertain any of those proposals. When the parents exercised a little pressure, Bahadur Singh declared that he would marry none but Balwant's widow. Jeet Singh did not like the idea but ultimately

he had to surrender.

Bahadur liked to do some work which might enable him to keep his collar white. Peasants cannot afford to have their clothes unspotted. So Bahadur resolved to become a general merchant and opened a shop at Jahangirabad. He, thus, started selling mirrors, babies' garments, perfumes, creams, powders, articles of hosiery and the like.

Bahadur Singh was happy with this work of his and equipped his shop with all that he deemed essential. But he had very few customers to patronize him. He found waiting boring and soon his patience was exhausted. People say, “Man proposes but God disposes.” And a day came when Bahadur Singh resolved to wind up the shop and come back home. And Jeet Singh resolved to entrust to him the task of managing the land of Peepara.

Jeet Singh was still more cautious in the case of Veer, the fourth son. Veer was not sent beyond Jahangirabad. But even Jahangirabad spoiled Veer Singh: he turned out to be a happy-go-lucky guy. He appeared to be a Greek interested in human beauty. Veer took no interest in studies with the result that he failed when he was a student of the seventh class. Consequently he was called back from the town of Jahangirabad and sent to a school in the neighbouring village of Jatpura. But even that bore no fruit and Jeet Singh had to admit one day that he had no option other than that of entrusting to Veer Singh the land of Lakshyapuri to manage.

Thus the landed property owned by Jeet Singh was divided into two parts, one of which was being managed by Bahadur Singh and the other of which was being managed by Veer Singh. Jeet Singh consoled himself with the idea that his land was in the safe hands of his sons. But Bahadur was not happy with the portion that had been entrusted to him. He wanted the landed property to be re-partitioned. Over this issue there was a feud between the two brothers. The feud caused enmity between them and in course of time there came a day when Veer Singh cut Bahadur Singh's head with just a digging instrument.

Anand Veer Singh, the fifth son, appeared to be very similar to his eldest brother in brilliance. Jeet Singh became still more cautious in his case. For his secondary education Anand Veer was sent to the Jatpura school. Anand passed the High School examination in first division and his name figured in the list of the meritorious students of the state of Uttar Pradesh. The list, I would like to mention, was prepared by the examination board of Uttar Pradesh. Anand Veer passed the Intermediate

examination also in first division. Jeet Singh was very happy. He felt his fifth son was going to make him realize his ends. So Jeet Singh gathered courage to send Anand to Meerut. And Anand, like Jeet Singh's second son, joined the most prestigious college of the city namely Meerut College Meerut.

But Meerut was still Meerut: It was full of charms. Its cinema halls appeared to Anand to be more charming than the college classes. These cinema halls attracted Anand so much that he viewed all the three film-shows almost daily. Thus from 3:00 p.m. to midnight Anand was inside one cinema-hall or another. Consequently, he failed to get through the examination of B.A. Part I. The second year the same tale was repeated. Anand Veer was still a student of B.A. Part I at Bulandshahar when one of his class-mates joined the college as a lecturer. And there arrived a day when Anand resolved to go back to Peepara to manage the land he had inherited from his father.

✠✠✠

GOD HEARD MY PRAYER

Ram and N. Ranjan were two of my school-fellows from my village Lakshyapuri. My school was about three miles from this village of ours. Like these two school-mates of mine I used to walk to and from the school. Often I accompanied them to the school with the result that we became close to each other. To tell you the truth, these two school-mates of mine were my seniors: they were senior to me by one year. So I liked to regard them as my guides. And I believe they were happy to play that role.

Ram was the son of a shopkeeper. So was N. Ranjan. Ram's father dealt in milk and milk products. So did the father of N. Ranjan. Ram lived in the Potters' Street. So did N. Ranjan. Ram smoked cigarettes. So did N. Ranjan. Ram liked me to be his friend. So did N. Ranjan.

On our way to school and back home we used to discuss various serious issues too. Some of these issues were political, some were social, some were academic, and some were metaphysical. One of the issues we used to discuss was the practice of the caste Hindus' regarding the scavengers and shoe-makers as untouchables. Another issue we frequently discussed was the role destiny plays in making a man's life successful or unsuccessful. Since India had attained freedom only three years before, we also discussed whether Mahatma Gandhi had committed a blunder in acceding to Mohammad Ali Jinna's demand to create Pakistan by cutting out a part of the territory of India.

One day we also discussed whether smoking was a good habit and whether or not one could do without smoking. Being the son of an *Ayurvedic* doctor I believed I was an authority on medical issues. So I asserted that smoking was injurious to health and that it caused several diseases. But neither Ram nor N. Ranjan agreed with me. They asserted that it was essential for a member of the Indian society to smoke and unless one smoked one would become a Robinson Crusoe in India. I said that it was foolish for one to start smoking to join a group of smokers.

"How will you entertain a guest if you don't have even a *hookka* (hubble-bubble) to offer? One who comes to you has to be entertained

adequately. Otherwise you will be left companionless in the society. And if you have no friends and companions, you will not be able to get even your sons and daughters married," said N. Ranjan.

Those were the days when the practice of drinking tea and coffee had not reached the villages in the northern part of India. So far as my knowledge goes only one man drank tea in our village at that time: he was a teacher who taught English in the school of Justpura though he lived at Lakshyapuri. For his practice of drinking tea five times a day people regarded him as a crank. So I could not think of entertaining a guest by offering him tea or coffee. My father too used to smoke *biris* and *hookka* and he entertained his guests by offering them something to smoke. As a matter of fact he had two *hookkas*: one the regular size and the other a smaller one called *kali.* The *hookka* which he himself used was offered to the Brahmin guests, and the *kali* was meant for the non-Brahmin caste Hindus. The rest were offered cigarettes or *biris.* So even though I argued against the practice of smoking, in my heart of hearts I felt that Ram and N. Ranjan were not wrong because what they were saying was being practised in my family.

And since I felt that, I started smoking. Both Ram and Ranjan were good enough to provide me cigarettes free whenever they met me. They did not let me feel that cigarettes had to be bought and for that one needed money. I knew father was not going to give me any money to buy cigarettes. Nay, I knew if he came to know I had started smoking, he would thrash me hard mercilessly.

By the grace of God one day when all the three of us were on our way back home, Zabar Singh happened to overtake us. Zabar Singh was another school-fellow of mine from Lakshyapuri. He was one year senior to both Ram and Ranjan. He saw all the three of us were smoking. He did not mind Ram's and Ranjan's smoking. But he did not ignore my smoking. He said, "You too, Brahma Dutta?" Perhaps he thought I was too good to submit to the vice of smoking, and I had not stood up to his expectations. He must have felt hurt on finding me smoking. I was believed to be a model of righteousness and faultlessness in my behavior.

"I'll inform your father that you have started smoking. I am going to inform your father today itself. When I reach the village, first I shall go to your house to tell your father that you have started smoking and then go home," said Zabar Singh.

I was stunned to hear these words. The seriousness with which he

spoke made it clear to me that this threat was not hollow. Now I realized I had committed a blunder in letting myself be persuaded by Ram and N. Ranjan into becoming a cigarette-smoker. I wanted to request Zabar Singh not to convey this piece of information to my father, but I said nothing to him. I felt that if I did that all the three would laugh at me and also tease me.

Zabar Singh left us at a well under a jambu tree and hurried homeward. When Ram and N.Ranjan got up to leave for the village, I gave some excuse for not accompanying them, as they appeared to me to have acted as tempters. I feared they would tempt me to some other vice sooner or later and so I had decided to avoid their company at the earliest.

I was absolutely sure that the moment I reached home I would receive exemplary corporal punishment. I did not know how to evade it. But I could delay it by staying put under the jambu tree at the well. One full hour was over, but I was still sitting under the jambu tree. At the end of the second hour too I was there. The third hour was gone, but I was still steadfast in my resolution not to leave the spot.

Yet by the sunset I was not able to think of a place other than my home where I could go and sleep. And then I had to move. I prayed to God to help me and said, “Please, God, save me this time; I'll never smoke again during my life-time.”

When I reached home, my father, to my pleasant surprise talked to me in the normal way and did not mention either Zabar Singh or my smoking. That meant Zabar Singh had not told him anything about my having submitted to the vice of smoking. I felt relieved and thanked God a number of times. And to this moment I have kept my word about my never to smoke again.

✠✠✠

GOD'S WILL WAS DONE

It was the summer of, if I correctly remember, 1949. I was a primary school student of standard Two. It was a one-teacher school run in a one-room building. I have forgotten the name of the teacher. However, what I remember is that we called him 'Pandit ji' and that he belonged to the village called Mullani, whatsoever it may mean. The school was located in a village named Charaura only about two furlongs from ours.

Those were the days when I wished my handwriting to be very neat and clean, and also very attractive at least, if not flowery. But all my efforts to make it look attractive proved to be exercises in futility. The moment I looked at the exercise books of my fellow students, I felt ashamed of my unattractive handwriting. For example, the handwriting of Khetal was so attractive that what he wrote looked to have been printed. Perhaps, I began to regard Khetal's handwriting as a model for me. What I noted in particular in Khetal's handwriting was that his letters starting from the top of the line reached only its middle. At that time I was learning Hindi and so I am talking of my Hindi hand-writing. My writing stick was such that my letters covered the whole line from the top to the bottom and every letter looked to be extra tall and over-bulky. So I inferred that my handwriting looked unattractive because the point of my writing stick was broader than that of Khetal's.

Those were the days when school children had to wait for months, nay even years, to have paper sheets to write on. In those days the beginners were provided with wooden planks to practise writing on so that, perhaps, sheets of paper could be spared for useful work. Only after a child had acquired adequate proficiency in shaping alphabet and figures he was provided with an exercise book. People in those days were not as prosperous as they are now and were economical in their ways. If they come today they will be surprised to find how wasteful their descendants are. It was also believed in those days that the longer time one spent in practising writing on wooden planks the better it was, as it ensured that the child's handwriting was going to be really neat and clean and the child's letters would look attractive. And when the child was provided with a sheet of paper to write on, he had to wait for three to four

years before he was allowed to use a nib to write with. He was allowed to use only a reed writing-stick to write with. Consequently, a student had to carry with him an inkpot too, in case he intended to write something.

Since children did not have an easy access to knives in those. I was one of them. They had to depend on teachers or guardians to convert their reed-sticks into writing sticks. Converting a reed-stick into a writing stick of the writer's choice is not an easy task: the reed-stick is first cut slant at one end; a bit of the head of the point one gets thereby has to be slashed at the angle of 120 degrees; and it has to be ensured that the writing point is neither thinner nor bolder than the size the writer desires. This writing point of the stick is called *khat* in Hindi. If this *khat* is thicker or thinner than the desired size it may not be liked by the writer, with the result that it may spoil his mood altogether and may turn him away from the task of writing he has undertaken. In order to ensure that the flow of the ink from the stick to the paper is uninterrupted, the tongue of the writing stick is torn into two at the end-point.

I was very choosy about the breadth of the *khat* of my writing stick. But the writing stick that my father prepared for me always had a very broad *khat* with the result I was never happy with it. I wanted my hand-writing to be as attractive as that of Khetal. No doubt, my father also wanted me to have a beautiful hand-writing, but his definition of a beautiful hand-writing was different from mine. Father wanted me to write letters big enough to cover the whole of the line from the top to the bottom, but I wanted my letters to hang from the top only to the middle of the line like Khetal's. To me the letters which covered the whole line from the top to the bottom were unwieldy and gave the impression that they were written by a beginner. It hurt my self-respect if I wrote letters big enough to cover the whole line from the top to the bottom. After all I was no more a beginner and had acquired an experience of several months!

One day when Panditji announced that he was going to give us a dictation test, I took my writing stick and wrote the date on the sheet I was going to use for the test. I happened to look at the answer-sheet of a neighbour of mine to get an idea of what kind of handwriting he had. I found that his letters were much smaller in size than those I had written on my sheet. The *khat* of his writing stick had been slashed by Panditji himself. This fact gave me the idea that I too should approach Panditji to have a writing stick with the *khat* of the desired size. I did not know how to articulate this opinion of mine, but I knew that if I took my broken writing stick to Panditji, he would reshape it to make it usable. I

immediately broke the end-point of my writing stick and took it to Panditji to get it reshaped. Panditji was shaping or reshaping the writing sticks of other students too. So as I approached him, he took my reed-stick from me and started using his knife dexterously. He cut the piece slant at one end, beheaded the point gained thereby to provide it a *khat,* and pressed at a point near the *khat* with the point of the knife to tear the remaining layer of the peel. When he handed over to me my writing stick I believed I had succeeded in getting a writing stick with a *khat* of my choice and came back to my seat happily.

But when I put the inked point of my writing stick on the paper, to my utter dismay I found that the *khat* was as broad as the earlier one. This meant that all my efforts to get a writing stick with a *khat* of my liking had gone waste and my letters were going to be fatty. I felt I had been cheated. What to do now? Panditji had failed to understand my problem. He had again given me what I wanted to get rid of.

However, an idea came to my mind. By tearing the tongue of the writing stick into two Panditji had made it two-legged. If I broke one of the two legs, the size of the *khat* would be reduced to its half and I would get the point of the *khat* of the desired size. The idea delighted me and I broke one of its two legs! I drenched the tongue of the stick in ink and tried to write the next letter of the word I had left in the middle. But this time the ink did not flow down the leg of the stick! What to do now? I looked hither and thither. There was no angel from God to guide me.

Jaipal was smiling when our eyes met. He was a class-mate of mine. He belonged to my village. His father was my father's junior friend. So I expected some help from him. But the Devil surprised me when he said, “You have broken your writing stick. Shall I report the matter to Panditji ?” His smile made me feel that he might be joking. So I said, “You may.” But he actually reported the matter to Panditji when he shouted, “Panditji Brahma Dutta has broken his writing stick.”

Panditji looked at me with red eyes and said, “Brahma Dutta, come here. Let me see your writing stick.” Trembling like a culprit caught red-handed I went to Panditji and handed over my writing stick to him. He took the stick from me, looked at it, and put it on his cot at his feet. He caught me by the arm, pulled me towards himself so that my face was close to his feet on the cot. Now my back was right below his right elbow. And he started hitting me with his elbow. I have forgotten the number of hits. When the hits had gratified his ire he took my writing stick, cut it slant once again, cut its end-point to provide it a *khat,* and pierced the

remaining layer of the peel with the point of his knife.

When I reached my seat back, tears were still flowing down my eyes quite fast. I turned to see Jaipal's reaction: he was laughing. My having been beaten had given him immense tragic pleasure, perhaps. He was delighted in the true sense of the word.

When I started writing the words Panditji was uttering I found the *khat* of my writing stick was as broad as that of my original stick. It reminded me of the size of the blade of my spade. I was helpless: I felt I was fated to write with a writing stick with such a broad *khat*. I was ashamed to see my fatty letters. But God's will was being done!

✠✠✠

HE LOST HIS LIFE IN THE PRIME OF HIS YOUTH

Unlike Cassius he was fat. But he was not lethargic. He tried to take an active part in every protest. Ambitious he definitely was. Whether or not he wanted to gain state power and do something in the political field at the state level I do not know, but he wanted to gain power at the level of the University for sure. He was not interested in studies so much as he was in agitations. He lost no opportunity to rise against me when I was working as the Director of the Lake City Campus of the Himalayan University.

His name was Neeru. Though he was about 23, he was still a student of the first year of the degree course. He contested at least one election for an office of the students' union of the university. During my tenure as the Director of the Campus he came to me at least three times, but each time his demands were such that I was not able to accept any of them, and each time this led to a confrontation.

I found during my tenure as Director of this Campus that the behaviour of the student-leaders of the university was not, what I regarded as, normal. Each of them seemed to be living on the verge of exploding. They seemed to have little trust in their teachers and seemed to believe that it was essential for them to have confrontation with the teachers as often as possible without rhyme or reason. Why these students behaved like that I was not able to understand. The Vice Chancellor was of the opinion that what these students did against me was a part of a sponsored programme and it was being sponsored by the teachers who had felt offended on my becoming Director of the Campus. One day the Vice Chancellor told me in explicit terms that I belonged to the plains while these students wanted somebody from the hills to replace me. However, I am also sure that many persons belonging to the hills were supporting me whole-heartedly while there were many persons from the plains who had done me genuine harm for no fault of mine. So it was not a plain plains-versus-hills fight. Sometimes I like to think that I was fated to face a situation of this kind and the other characters in the play were mere puppets in the hands of the

Powers-that-be.

There might have been another reason too: the student leaders of the hills had the example of Narayan Dutta Tewari ji before them and many of them wanted to follow that path. Tewari ji had been a student-leader in his early days and when he joined active politics, he went on rising to the extent that he became Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh thrice, joined the Central Cabinet as Industries Minister and once there was a rumour that he was going to be sworn in Prime Minister of India. If the President of one students' union can raise himself that high, why can the President of another students' union not do so? I heard a few students giving arguments like this. And it was not very difficult to be elected President of the students' union of this Himalayan University. In order to get elected one had to be friendly with all the students of the university, to spend a few thousand rupees on them and to show to them that the Director of the Campus was in his fist. And if a Director refused to become a tool in their hands, he was a hindrance and they thought they had a right to remove him from their path.

The first time Neeru came to me when he wanted some students to be admitted to the first part of B.Sc. This must have been in the month of August or September. I had been told by the Dean of the Faculty of Science that all the seats had been filled and that no seat had been left vacant. I told Neeru in very sweet, though plain, terms that all the seats had been filled and the admissions had been closed. Neeru wanted all the remaining applicants of the hills to be admitted. I said very politely that I was helpless. But instead of being satisfied with my reply he felt offended and as soon as he and his companions were out of my room they started shouting ,' B. D. Sharma chor hai' (B.D.Sharma is a thief). I was naturally angry and wanted to ask him what treasure of his grandfather I had stolen. But I suppressed my anger and pocketed the insult. I said to myself that he was still an immature boy who did not understand the meaning of what he was saying. I recollected, however, a colleague's having told me long before that the usual practice in the world was that if they wanted to hang a man, they, first, gave him a bad name. But who wanted me to be given a bad name? Were they my rivals for the post of Director? I do not know why Neeru was so serious about the admission of these students. He, perhaps, believed they would vote for him in the election. There might have been financial reasons too for him to be so vigorously insistent.

The university had to be kept closed during winter every year as then

it was too cold for the students to stay at an altitude of six thousand feet up the Himalayas and attend classes in which there were no air-conditioners and no room-heaters. That was the period when even the permanent residents of Lake City sought asylum in some neighbouring town in the plains. The rains were frequent then and they were interspersed with snowfalls too. Usually the first snowfall coincided with the Christmas. So the schools of the City were closed latest by 15th of December. We tried to keep the University open in the month of December and winter-break began on the 1st of January. Yet about fifty percent students of the university left the City by the 15th of December. That year too we decided to close the university on the 31st of December for two months as usual. Most of my colleagues left the town on the 31st of December itself. But I decided to stay on as some work of the term was still pending.

It was, if I correctly remember, the second of January when Neeru came to me the second time. Like every student leader he was accompanied by a flock of followers. He demanded that the admission work be continued in January as many students who had been declared successful in the Improvement examination had not yet taken admission. This was very difficult for me at that stage to call the teachers to the university to do admission work. Winter-break had already begun and many teachers had already left for their homes. When I told Neeraj so, he said that I had committed a mistake in closing the university for the winter that soon. He added that there were no clouds yet and the days were still sunny. I told him that generally weather became very cold during the first week of January and usually the winter break began on the first of January. I added that there were also years in which the university was closed for the winter on the 24th of December. I also said that fifty percent students had left the town around the 15th of December. But he said:

"Don't you see the days are still sunny and there is no cloud in the sky? Studies were going on very smoothly when you abruptly declared the winter-break."

"The decision to close the university for the winter was taken last week in a meeting chaired by the Vice Chancellor. I am not a weather prophet. How could I know then that the second of January would be sunny or cloudy? Moreover, who knows that even if the morning is sunny there will be no clouds in the sky by the afternoon? Everybody knows that the weather of this City is absolutely unpredictable," said I.

"I know many teachers are still here and they can be called to do

admission work. Do call them and restart the admission work. Those who cannot work in the cold weather must leave their jobs too," said he.

"I cannot call teachers to do admission work in the holidays and you know holidays have already begun," said I.

"He is not going to listen to us until he is thrashed." This sentence was spoken by Mannu, not Neeru. Mannu was one of the members of Neeraj's flock.

This was too much and I called the police to maintain order on the Campus. And they readily responded to my call. The policemen of the City had helped me earlier too. It was with their help that I was able to conduct examinations and hold elections of the Students' union every year. I had been helped not only by Bharadwaj ji and Sharma ji but also by Rajendra ji . Nay even Mr. Bungyal and the S.P. had been very helpful.

The presence of policemen in the Director's room calmed down Mannu and he did not utter even one single word after this on that day. But Neeru became unruly enough to sit on my table itself in order to persuade the policemen that the University had been closed for the winter too early, and the policemen had to tell him that it was impertinence on his part to sit on the table of the Director of the Campus.

The abnormality of the behaviour of some of the student leaders was shocking not only to me, but also to the onlookers. I had not behaved like that even with a peon. These students treated me worse than an enemy and were always ready to challenge me. Once I even resigned. But the Vice Chancellor persuaded me to withdraw my resignation.

The third time Neeru came with the demand that I should terminate the services of Jagan. Jagan was a professor heading one of the Departments of the University. I told him that there was a set procedure to terminate the services of a university teacher and it was not possible for anybody to terminate some teacher's services offhand. He said that Jagan had been taking money from the students for conducting Ph. D. viva voce examinations and the like, though he was not authorized to do that. I said that if any such charge was there, action could be taken only after an enquiry committee's report was available. And I assured him that an enquiry committee would be set up and, if Jagan was found guilty, appropriate action would be taken against him. But Neeru was not satisfied. He and his friends left me there and tried to deal with Jagan in their own way. I did my best to see that the matters did not take an ugly turn but there had arrived on the spot a crowd of students and they were

shouting slogans against Jagan and took him to the maidan outside the New Arts Faculty building. There was a lot of noise but no force was used against any, so far as my knowledge goes. This was the observation of the Chief Proctor of the University too. The newspapers, however, reported the next day that Jagan had been thrashed by students very badly. And this led to teachers' deciding to go on strike for two days. This strike was, obviously, against me. However, the Vice Chancellor refused to replace me.

Those were the days when the Central government had acceded to partition Uttar Pradesh into two states, namely Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal and attempts were being made by the leaders of these two states to take as much land as possible. The districts of Hardwar and Rudrapur were the main bones of contention. The leaders of Uttaranchal were not satisfied with the hilly parts of the state and wanted to take a few districts of the plains too as these districts were rich in agricultural land, though they claimed that the culture of the hills was different from that of the plains and so it was not possible for the inhabitants of thee two cultural groups to live together harmoniously. Various kinds of pressure tactics were being used. (Eventually both these districts were, later, given to Uttaranchal and, consequently, Uttar Pradesh was deprived of the holy waters of Har Ki Peri and the Agriculture University of Pantnagar along with the rich agricultural land of these two districts).

One day a Minister of Uttar Pradesh happened to come to Rudrapur. Neeraj regarded it as an opportunity to pressurize the Minister into agreeing to assure his audience of Rudrapur that he would persuade his colleagues in the government of Uttar Pradesh to give Rudrapur to Uttaranchal. I do not know what shape the incidents took there. But the next day there was a news item in the news papers that Neeraj had been shot dead by the body-guard of the Minister. This must have been done when Neeraj must have been trying to pressurize the Minister to accept his demand. It was thus that Neeru lost his life in the prime of his youth.

✠✠✠

HIS LOVE OF DEATH

Brahma Narayan told me and, at least, two friends of mine that he had lost every desire to live and that he was full in love with easeful death! He had done so a number of times. Nay, he went to a few doctors too to request them to inject poison into his body and to do, what is called, euthanasia, or mercy-killing. Those were the days when an attempt to commit suicide was regarded as a crime in India. It was, if my memory is sound, in 1991 or 1992 that the Supreme Court of India gave its verdict that an attempt to commit suicide was no longer a crime. The incidents I am talking of occurred sometimes in the 1980's.

Brahma Narayan had been suffering from asthma for years and in the 1980's his condition had become really pitiable. He was being visited by the fits of asthma very frequently and every successive fit was more tormenting than the former one. When a fit visited him, he coughed and coughed and coughed, but the mucus inside his chest refused to move out. His respiratory tube seemed to have become too narrow to allow him to inhale even an adequate amount of air. Consequently, he had to make an extra effort to inhale as much air as his lungs needed.

On the repeated warnings of the doctors he had stopped drinking. He had also stopped smoking. He wondered what else he would be required to do. Since the medicines were no longer effectual, and, consequently, every new fit brought to him nothing else but sufferings, he had decided to die the moment he got an opportunity to do that.

One day I told Brahma Narayan I knew how he could have considerable relief from asthma provided he adopted the naturopathic ways of living. He did not believe me as in his eyes I was not a doctor. It was obvious that I had not earned the M.B.B.S. degree and we needed no ghost to tell us that I was not a doctor. For Brahma Narayan only M.B.B.S degree holders were to be trusted as medical guides. I told him that since allopathy had declared asthma to be an incurable disease there was no point in knocking at the gates of allopaths for a cure of asthma.

However, there came a day when he turned to me and asked me what I wanted him to do. I advised him to be on complete fast for three days

and to feel sorry for his acts of drinking and smoking in his youth. I also advised him to refrain only from eating but to go on drinking as much water as he felt like. This was the introductory step. Brahma Narayan agreed and said that he would definitely do that. He added that he would begin his fast on the Tuesday of the subsequent week. I did not disagree with him.

Tuesday arrived and Brahma Narayan resolved not to eat anything for three days, nor to drink anything but plain water during this period of three days. The morning of the day passed uneventfully. Even the lunch time was over. Brahma Narayan was firm that he would continue to be on fast.

In the afternoon Brahma Narayan went to the market and started his shopping. He was doing shopping in the normal way till the tea-time. When the tea-time arrived, Brahma Narayan was in the Bazaza Market of Hapur. There he was suddenly over-powered by physical weakness so much that he found there was nothing but darkness all around and he was going to fall on the ground. He felt no energy had been left in his body.

This experience lasted only for a few moments and Brahma Narayan was normal again. But he wanted to know what this complete darkness was. Wasn't it the darkness of death? Had he had a short experience of death? Had he encountered a short- lived death?

Brahma Narayana should have been happy to have this temporary encounter with death and should have wished it to be repeated. After all he had been telling people he wanted to die. But he was not happy. Nor did he want it to be repeated. On the contrary, he shuddered at the possibility of its repetition. Nay, he feared that if he did not eat something immediately he might have the experience again and that he might not recover this time.

So he instantly hired a rickshaw, came back home and took food.

✠✠✠

HIS DECLARATION OF HIS INDEPENDENCE

It was Anil who informed me one day that Pradyumna smoked a great deal and that I should do something to make him get rid of this bad habit. The piece of information disturbed me considerably because I believed Pradyumna to have been leading a vice-free life. In 1985 Pradyumna was only twelve years old and his taking to smoking at that tender age might do him a lot of harm. Nay, if he had started smoking at that tender age, he might submit to a more harmful addiction a little later. After all "the child is father of the man." His smoking was also a deviation from the family norm: neither I nor his elder brother Meghraj smoked at all. And in the family we were the only two male elders for him to emulate. That was one more reason for me to take the matter seriously. I thanked Anil for the piece of information and for drawing my attention to a weakness of my son.

When Pradyumna and I had taken our meals in the evening that day and were preparing ourselves to go to bed, I called Pradyumna and said to him:

"Pradyumna, I have come to know that you have started smoking cigarettes, and that you smoke a great deal."

"Who told you that?" asked Pradyumna in return.

"I have come to know somehow. What is relevant is not the name of the person who has told me so but the fact that you smoke," said I.

"No, it is wrong. I do not smoke at all," said he.

"But you have been seen smoking," said I.

"Who has seen me smoking? That is the reason why I am asking you as to who has told you that I smoke. You trust outsiders, not your own son," said he.

"It is none but an outsider that can inform me as to what you do when you go out, as neither I nor your mother accompanies you when you leave home," said I.

"The outsiders can tell even lies. You should not take their reports as gospel truths," said he.

I was unable to decide as to whom I should trust: Anil or my own son. However, I decided not to precipitate the matter at that time. So I said:

"Well, what I mean to say is that if you have started smoking, stop doing it now, as smoking is harmful for health. If you do not smoke, it is all right."

****

It was in 2003, some eighteen years later, that one day I went to meet Pradyumna. At that time Pradyumna was a member of the Faculty of an institute teaching B.B.A. and B.C.A. classes at Ghaziabad. He was also the warden of the hostel run by the institute. He was suffering from some skin disease which had caused his face to become puffy. For his treatment I had approached several doctors allopathic, homeopathic, Ayurvedic and Unani including Dr. Behal, a former Professor and Head, Department of Skin Diseases in All India Institute of Medical Sciences Delhi, but no treatment had been found effective. This disease had been causing us a lot of worries, but I did not know what else I could do to make Pradyumna get rid of this disease.

It was a Sunday and I hoped to find Pradyumna free to discuss various issues the family was facing. I left for Ghaziabad by train as the approach to the Institute from the railway station of Ghaziabad was easier than the one from the bus-stand of that town. I boarded the Delhi-bound Hapur-Delhi shuttle at about 6:30 a.m. and reached Ghaziabad at about 7:30 a.m.

At about 8:00 o'clock I was knocking at Pradyumna's door. When Pradyumna opened the door, he appeared to have been still sleeping. The swelling on his face was at its climax in the morning and as the day advanced it began to dwindle. I asked him how he was and he, as usual, replied that he was all right.

I stayed with him for half an hour or so. He told me that he had called his students for an extra class and that he would meet them at 9:00 a.m. He went on preparing himself for the class when I was talking to him. When he had put on his boots, he took out a cigarette from his pocket, put it between his lips, took out a match box from another pocket and lit the cigarette.

He was smoking as if he were doing nothing offending. In other words, his face did not bear any sign of the fact that in smoking the cigarette he was defying his father or that his behavior was offensive in any way. I felt like shouting at him in a state of fury. But I did not. I kept

myself seated on the bed as I was. I was looking at him not being able to decide what to say or what to do. I asked myself whether I was dreaming. I recollected Pradyumna's having told me eighteen years before that he did not smoke at all and that it was wrong for me to believe outsiders rather than my own son. Now Pradyumna was smoking in my presence. My own eyes told me Pradyumna was smoking. I asked myself, "Should I disbelieve my eyes?" Or rather "Should I believe my eyes?" I again looked at him. He was still smoking without looking at me. Did it not prove that Pradyumna smoked cigarettes? Were my eyes too outsiders? Was I supposed to trust them or not?

Within seconds of this I found myself rise up from the bed, and come out of Pradyumna's residence hurriedly without uttering even a word. I was walking fast towards the railway station. My feet were very light even though my heart was heavy. Within minutes I was back at the station. And a Hapur-bound train brought me back to Hapur within an hour. When I was back home, Pradyumna's mother asked me whether I had missed the train to Ghaziabad.

When Pradyumna and I met after a gap of a few weeks I asked Pradyumna, "You have been telling me for years that you do not smoke but I saw you smoking in my presence in your house at Ghaziabad in the hostel of the Institute. Will you say even now that you do not smoke and that outsiders misguide me against you?"

"Yes, I still say that I do not smoke. I smoked one cigarette only that day," said Pradyumna.

"Why did you smoke that cigarette that day, if you do not smoke?" asked I.

"I smoked that cigarette that day in your presence because you have been asking me for years that I should stop smoking."

I was stunned to hear these words of his. They implied that his smoking in my presence that day was his declaration of his independence. I did not know that he hated me that much. He went to that extent simply in order to defy me!

****

Only a few weeks after this, one day Pradyumna came back home bag and baggage. He told me that the management of the Institute had terminated his services. I asked him why the management had done that. He said that the students declared him to be too strict and refused to

tolerate his disciplinarian approach. I resolved to meet the Director of the Institute. The Director told me that he knew he had no right to go into the personal life of a teacher, but the students of the Institute had gone on a strike against Pradyumna and had asked for his removal. I asked him whether there were any chances of the Management's agreeing to revoke their order. He said that he was not in a position to say anything in that regard. However, he advised me to meet Mr Mittal who was one of the most influential members of the managing committee.

Mittal was quite frank in expressing his views. He told me, "One day Pradyumna gave a medical prescription to one of his students and asked her to buy for him the medicine from the chemist's shop. The student went to the chemist's shop. But the chemist refused to give her those pills and asked the girl whether she knew what she wanted to buy. When the girl told him that she had been sent to buy that medicine by a teacher of hers, he told her that the medicine she had come to buy was nothing but sleeping pills and that he would not sell them to her. It was this incident that stirred up students against Pradyumna and they demanded his immediate ouster."

Mittal said, "Ours is a private institute and we can make it run smoothly only so long as we have the support of the students because they are our only source of income. They are our real patrons. We cannot survive if we ignore their demands and suppress their voice."

And I had to agree with him. I did know that Pradyumna was in the habit of consuming sleeping pills, as months ago I had found them in his pocket though I did not know how frequently and in what quantity he consumed them.

✠✠✠

HOBSON'S CHOICE

I wanted to help Ramu. After all he was my younger brother and I knew he was not able to earn much. Moreover, I regarded myself as the *de facto* head of the family as well as its chief executive, though my father was its *de jure* head. I wanted everybody in the family to have an equal share in our earnings. Ramu was a poorly paid employee on the one hand, and an inadequately educated person, on the other. Consequently he was not aware of the measures the then government of India was taking to better the lot of the economically challenged sections of the society. I thought I was a well-informed man and was in a position to guide Ramu. I had had my life insured for a handsome amount of money from the standards of those days and I was happy my family would get a substantial sum in case I died prematurely. So I decided to get Ramu's life too insured at my cost. I took it for granted that Ramu was not in a position to pay anything for it. I called the LIC Development Officer and got Ramu's life insured the day Ramu happened to come to me. I was genuinely happy with this action of mine as I felt I had done something that was going to benefit Ramu and his family.

In those days I was living in the University town of Ramkrishnapuram but in every even modestly long break I went home to be with my parents and spent as much of my time with them as I could. So when the University was closed for a week for the festival of Holi, I went to Murshidabad to be with my parents. There I found Bela, my wife, had left for her mother's about two weeks ago. She had taken with her our two year old daughter Kavita too. However, our son Shivraj was still there with my parents. Shivraj must have been six years old at that time.

One evening when I went for a walk, Shivraj insisted on accompanying me. On the way Shivraj was holding my finger. Or rather, I asked him to hold my finger. He was quite vocal in his own way and was able to express his feelings to some extent at least.

His first sentence was:

"Grandpa never lets me hold his finger when I accompany him."

"Why?" I asked him.

"He withdraws his hand whenever I try to hold it," said he.

"What does he say?" asked I.

"He says, 'Don't hold my finger' ", said he.

I did not ask him any more questions in this regard. I did not want to hear anything against my father. But was it O.K. for my father not to let his small six year old grandson even hold his finger? I expected him to like it. Was there something rotten in the state of Denmark?

"Ramu uncle tied both the hands of Bela," said Shivraj.

"What?" asked I, unable to believe my ears.

"Ramu uncle tied both the hands of Bela," he repeated.

"With a piece of string?" asked I.

"Yes", said he.

"Why?" asked I.

"Ask him. I do not know", he replied.

Neither my mother nor my father had told me anything about this incident. It means things at home were not transparent and many of them were being kept hidden from me. But why were they being hidden from me? They conveyed even the minor mistakes of Bela to me. Why was this incident of fastening the hands considered trivial? Was it not possible for father to keep the members of the family disciplined any more? Was he simply trying to give the impression he was managing things properly by keeping me ignorant about ugly things? Was the 'Keep things hushed up' technique being applied in some cases? If Bela had committed a mistake, mother was there to take action. Who had empowered Ramu to take action? Why did Ramu go to the extent of fastening her hands? In what way had she misused her hands as a result of which she deserved this ill-treatment?

A host of questions of that kind stormed into my mind. But who was there to give me the answer? I should have addressed them to either father or mother or Ramu. But I was not able to gather courage to do that. I did not want to give the impression I doubted my parents' intentions or capabilities. Ramu was my brother and I did not want to give the impression I cared for my wife more than for him. This was a Hamlet-like situation: I wanted to see the results palatable to me but I was not prepared to do anything. I was not prepared even to speak. Was I a coward? Or was I too dutiful in a context where might had become the

only right, and duty had become an obsolete value?

****

One evening I came back home to find my parents talking in the sitting-room. I lay down on my cot without interfering. My mother smiled to see me and asked me if I would like to eat something. I did not feel like eating anything. And this I said to mother. Father asked me to take proper care of my health. He asked me whether I never saw my face in the mirror. If I had seen my image in the mirror I would have become aware of the fact that I was aging very fast and that even though I was a young man in years I looked quite old. He said the whole family depended on me for care, support and what not. He added that unless I took care of it, it would be left in the lurch. Then mother took up the topic and started elaborating upon it:

"Yes, it is he who is dutifully taking care of the whole family: he gave us money for the construction of this house; he arranged money for Ramu to buy a car; it is with his money that Pramod has been able to do B. Sc. And is now doing M. Sc."

"Do you want me to feel grateful to him for all that? Did I not arrange money for his education earlier? He is doing nothing new," said father.

"He paid money even for Ramu's insurance policy," said mother.

"He got Ramu's life insured for he will get commission for it from the Life Insurance Corporation. He has not done this selflessly," said father.

"No, no, he will get no commission. He paid the whole money from his own salary," said mother.

"You are ignorant. The Life Insurance Corporation gives commission for every insurance policy that is purchased. That is the reason why Krishna Prakash got Ramu's life insured. Why would Krishna Prakash spend money for Ramu's insurance otherwise?" said father.

Mother waited for me to respond, perhaps. But I decided not to intercept. However, what came to my mind again and again was that father knew I was not an L.I.C. agent. How could I get any commission, then? Even if I had become an agent and had received commission on the money I was spending, I would have been given much less than what I

had paid to the LIC. In what way had I served my selfish interest by buying a policy for Ramu?

However, I did not want any return for the money I had spent for Ramu. After all he was my brother. But did father believe what he had said to mother? Well, father is, as Yudhishthir tells the Yaksha, higher than the sky. Let him say what he likes.

****

On the day of Dhulhendi people celebrating Holi throw coloured powder and coloured water on whomsoever they like. Some throw even mud. Some persons colour people's faces red, blue or even black and, then, laugh at them. This is the day on which everybody tries to avail himself of the license one is permitted to avail. We were making preparations for it in our home that day: we were trying to find clothes which we were ready to sacrifice for the Holi merriments; we were preparing coloured water to throw on people; we were trying to acquire coloured powder of red and green colour. Mother was in the kitchen as my wife was not at home. Ramu took a bottle of XXX Rum and went out. I thought he was going to drink with some friend of his though I did not know he had any friend of that kind in that town of ours.

We had not been able to complete our preparations when Sharbati, the sister of my mother came to our house and complained to mother:

"Sister, Ramu is compelling Shashi Bhan's wife to drink wine. Actually he is insisting on each one's drinking with him. Even I had to pretend I had drunk a cup he had offered to me. But how can Shashi Bhan's wife drink wine? "

"So he went to your house?" said mother.

"Yes," said Sharbati.

"I wondered where he was going with that bottle. I could not even imagine he would go to your house," said mother.

"Yes, he entered our house with a bottle in his pocket. Nobody in our family drinks. We do not drink even coca cola. But he wants us to drink wine. Both Shashi Bhan and Jitendra had to oblige him by pretending to drink. But his insisting on my daughter-in-law's drinking with him is too much. If she chides him, he will feel offended and even you will not like that," said Sharbati.

Mother went to father in the sitting room. She told him what

Sharbati had told her. I expected father to lose his temper and drag Ramu from Sharbati's house back to ours. But he simply said:

"This boy will stain our reputation to the very core. Go and ask h i m to drink one pitcherful of wine, but he should do it here in his own house."

Mother turned to go to Sharbati's house with a little hesitation not knowing how Ramu would react to her going to him. However, before she was at the gate, she saw Ramu coming homeward. He was wearing a white shirt and white pantaloons. To see him coming everybody became silent and heaved a sigh of relief. It appeared that good sense had prevailed upon him and that he had resolved to come back home to do the ugly business. Nobody said anything to him and he said not a word to anybody. He went inside the house. All of us turned to our engagements as if we knew nothing about Ramu's whereabouts.

But soon it was revealed that we were wrong. Ramu came out of the inner room with another bottle of XXX Rum. He had thrust it in one pocket of his pantaloons. That means he was going to employ some other strategy to make Shashi Bhan's wife drink. So he was going to make renewed efforts to achieve his end!

When he had crossed half of the courtyard, father tried to stop him. He caught Ramu's arm and said to him:

"If you must drink, drink inside your own house. I cannot allow you to drink publicly or in somebody else's house."

This offended Ramu. Somebody was keeping him away from his end! He took the bottle out of his pocket and threw it on the floor so forcefully that it was broken into hundreds of pieces and its contents were flowing down the drain. Even father was stunned. Nobody anticipated such a behaviour from Ramu. Perhaps the incident created a little terror too.

What was left for me to choose in such a situation? If Ramu was so undisciplined in the presence of both father and mother, how much more undisciplined he would be in their absence? And what would happen when he was the monarch of all he surveyed in the absence of his seniors? Did he deserve any sympathies? Or did he deserve any co-operation? Was it safe for me to remain a member of the joint family of which Ramu was a member? And I decided to part company with him for good and to inform father of my decision.

✠✠✠

HOW MY COUGH BECAME IRREMEDIABLE

I was about twenty-five then. I was suffering from severe cough. It was the month of August. Or was it July? I do not exactly remember. I went to Dr. Dubey. Dr. Dubey was a mature man of about forty-five and had come to Hapur just a few months before. He was very sympathetic in his behavior and had earned a good reputation as a doctor and also as a man.

"I am suffering from cough. And it is dry," said I.

"Drink hot water," said Dr. Dubey.

"I have been doing that for almost a weak and there is no effect on the dryness of my cough. As a matter of fact the dryness has made it very severe. When I cough, it causes me a lot of problem as it comes with a great force," said I.

"Let the water be as hot as tea," said he.

"All right. I shall do that," said I.

"Also take some injections of Dicrysticin," said Dr. Dubey.

"How many?" asked I.

"Take five. One injection per day, for five days," said he.

He handed over the prescription to me. I took it, went to the market and bought the injections.

These injections were administered. But my cough did not ease even a little. It was as dry as ever. Rather the force of coughing had increased considerably. The mucus inside the chest refused to budge from its place. When I coughed I felt somebody had hit the inside of my chest with a battering ram. My thirst had increased so much that I found it difficult to quench it. Drinking tea-hot water in the month of July was as inconvenient as sitting by the fireside in the month of June. Many a time the bout of cough was so persistent that it ended with a vomit. I felt no energy had been left in my body and it was difficult for me even to walk out of my house.

I again approached Dr. Dubey. I told him that the five injections had

failed to reduce the force of the cough and that it was as dry as ever. I added that my thirst had become unquenchable and usually the bout of cough terminated in a vomit.

"Then start taking the capsules of Mysticlene,' said Dr. Dubey.

"How many?" asked I.

"You have to take four capsules per day for five days. The full course of this treatment consists of twenty capsules," said he.

"But the cough has become so severe that when its bout is there my eyes turn blood-red and the bout usually terminates in a vomit," said I.

"Vomiting is a symptom of the presence of worms in the stomach. So take one dose of Antepar Elixir. A bottle of this medicine contains only one dose of medicine. So take the whole of it at about 8: 30 in the evening," said he.

"I am feeling increasingly weak and even walking to the hospital appears to be a difficult task. I find it difficult to stand in the class-room while teaching," said I.

"So start taking Sharkoferrol with milk twice a day. That tonic will remove your weakness," said he.

I took the prescription and bought all the medicines from the market. I started taking them strictly in accordance with the instructions of the doctor.

When I had taken 19 capsules and only one of them was left in the bottle, I decided to discontinue the treatment of Dr. Dubey. My patience was not inexhaustible. How long could I go on taking medicines which were only precipitating my cough. I thought allopathy had no treatment of the ailment I was suffering from.

I went to Vaidya Krishnagopal Sharma, an Ayurvedic doctor. When I had explained to him the ailment I was suffering from, he said to me, "Do not get Dicristicin injected into your body. In case you do that your cough will become a chronic disease. It will turn into asthma."

"But I have already taken injections of Dicristicin," said I.

"How many?' asked he.

"Five," replied I.

At this his face turned serious and he did not say anything at all. I too did not question him on this issue. As a matter of fact there had been left

nothing to talk about. I said to myself that I had become a patient of asthma and my cough was going to become my life-long companion. There is a saying in our part of India that asthma leaves one's body only when one's life does.

However, Dr. Krishna Gopal gave me medicines which included *sitopaladi* powder, mica ashes, and *lakshmi vilas rasa.* I was under his treatment for some time, but what was incurable could not be cured.

At the suggestion of Pandt Pyareylal Sharma I went to Buland Shahar to consult Dr. S.P. K. Sharma. Dr. Sharma was a chest diseases specialist. He examined me and started prescribing medicines. I asked him which disease I was suffering from.

"You are suffering from asthmatic bronchitis," was his simple reply.

This is how was confirmed that my simple cough had turned into asthma and my cough had become a chronic disease.

I am seventy-one now. Dr. Krishna Gopal is no more. But I am still suffering from cough.

✠✠✠

HOW WE LOST OUR LAND

Land we had, though it was not as much as we liked to have. My father was the owner of one sixth of a piece of land in which we had planted trees of mango, jamboo, khirni, peepal and neem. We called it our garden. The area of this piece of land was twelve bighas on paper. But on the ground it was only nine bighas. So the portion of this piece that was in our possession was only one-and-a-half bighas. Since all the owners of this piece of land were believed to be the descendants of one and the same ancestor, the piece was still regarded as one unit and they went on complaining that its partitioning had not been done properly and that what was needed was a re-partitioning of the piece. They used to say that the piece of land was still the 'commonwealth' of all the six families and that the partition agreement according to which every family had become the owner of a portion of this piece was not final. For 'commonwealth' they used the word '*brijmal patta*'.

Gulloo and Seera owned half of this garden and the rest of it belonged to three equal partners my father being one of them. It means my father owned one third of the half of this garden. The second one-third belonged to Hoomi and Basa. And the third one-third belonged to Balloo and Gol. It was Gulloo who usually described the garden as a '*brijmal patta*'. So for some of us Gulloo became Mr. Brijmal Patta.

Since ours was a village in which the status of a man was judged by the quantum of land he owned, everybody in the village tried to increase his land-holdings. Sometimes one did so by capturing somebody's land forcibly; some other times one added to one's land by purchasing some piece from somebody; and sometimes one 'inherited' somebody's land if this somebody had no offspring of his own. None of these things was easy. But when somebody succeeded in adding to his landed property, he regarded it as his real achievement. However, such a man eventually became a victim of other people's envy too.

When Hoomi and Basa shifted from Sampoornanagar to Lohara, a neighbouring village, with the hope that there they would be able to earn more, my father purchased not only one of their two houses but also their whole share in the garden. So my father became the owner of four bighas on paper and three bighas on the ground. This aroused envy in the hearts of the

other shareholders in the garden. But what could they do? Purchasing a piece of land is not objectionable from any point of view. However, they were not happy with this development. Maybe they felt they had a better right to buy this field. Maybe they felt my father had acted more smartly than they and had purchased the field without letting them have even an inkling of the deal. They were not able to restrain themselves for long and one day Seera approached my father and asked him to re-measure the garden and re-divide it.

Seera was an illiterate man who earned his living by animal husbandry. Usually he bought young ones of camels, husbanded them for a year or two, trained them for agricultural work and then sold them to agriculturists. Since doing this did not require much effort on his part he had a lot of time to loiter, loaf and gain friends. There were rumours about his being a man of loose morals too. Gulloo, his elder brother, ran a shop selling chiefly food items. His was one of the four shops in the village with the result that he was quite well off. Since he was still a bachelor he lived with his younger brother Seera.

The garden was re-measured but it was found that the portion which Seera and Gulloo had in their possession was bigger than the second portion. Seera refused to accept this finding and declared that he would accept the finding of an earlier measurement according to which his and Gulloo's part had been found smaller than the second one. Nay, he took his spade and shifted the partition wall about two meters into our part. He ruled out all the objections of father and had his way. Since in this division some part of Balloo and Gol also became the property of Seera and Gulloo, Seera shifted the boundary wall between our part and the part owned by Ballu and Gol about one meter into our piece. In other words we lost some land to Seera and his brother on the one hand and some land to Balloo and Gol on the other. Father felt it was an act of robbery pure and simple. He felt helpless as he was alone and his opponents were four in number, and in case there was a use of muscle power he did not expect to win. In our village, then, might was the only right. Father had to pocket both the insult and the loss of land.

Soon afterwards Seera purchased a piece of land not far away from the garden. The piece belonged to Sookha who had shifted to Anupshahr and had opened a cloth shop there. Since now Gulloo and Seera had become the owners of about fifteen bighas of land, they turned their attention to farming and decided to become agriculturists too. This was the time when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the Prime Minister of India and much was

being done for the welfare of agriculturists and the prices of agricultural products had become quite high with the result that agriculturists were becoming increasingly rich. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India had built several dams across rivers with the result that both water and electricity had become available to farmers and, in case they were aware of the changes taking place in the field of agriculture, they had started modernizing their farms.

There existed a well in our garden. It used to be used for irrigation purposes long ago, though at the moment it was lying unused. Seera wanted to make it usable so that he might use it for irrigating his land in the garden and also the land he had purchased from Sookha. The plan was good and profitable for him. But he wanted my father too to bear the expenses.

My father was an Ayurvedic doctor and had little time to take care of the land he owned. That was the reason why he had planted trees in this piece of land. We grew forage in it and got fruits from the trees. Thus we did have some return from the garden but it was not enough to make my father turn to agriculture and relinquish his Ayurvedic medical practice. He devoted most of his time to medical practice. However, when he was free from his patients he spent a few evenings in the garden too. But his work in the garden was more recreation than work. So he did not want to spend any money on making the well usable. Seera was not going to accept defeat that easily. He was a good strategist. He took the help of a *chaudhary,* a friend of his, and the two compelled father to accept their plan and also make financial contribution. This time, again, father had to pocket both insult and loss.

I loved this garden of ours a great deal. Whenever I had a day at my disposal, I took my books and went there to study them in absolute loneliness. Usually in the evening I went there to spend an hour or so to enjoy the company of the trees which we had named as Lakhpat, Chenpiya and the like. I regarded some of them as my friends. Sometimes I climbed up those trees and plucked fruit. I was able to climb up three of the mango trees, two of the guava trees and also the khirni tree. This khirni tree was my favourite and I climbed up this tree quite easily. It is said that the man who plants a khirni tree cannot eat its fruit as the tree takes about twenty years to bear fruit. But my father had succeeded in eating the fruit of the khirni tree he had planted. There were only two khirni trees in our village and one of them was ours. I used one of the jamboo trees to increase my height, as in those days I was considered short-sized in view of my age. These trees too seemed to love me as I found climbing up them quite easy and harmless. The garden had so many charms for me that if I was in the village I was sure

to spend some time in this garden, even if I went there just for five minutes.

From the point of view of muscle power of all the owners of the garden Seera was believed to be the sturdiest. And he was becoming increasingly aggressive towards us. How to withstand him? That was the problem I used to think over in those days. Sometimes I thought of resorting to some kind of guerilla tactics, and at others of braving the lion in his den itself. I also knew some weaknesses of his, though he gave the impression that he was both righteous and just. Perhaps, he was also proud of his argumentative capacity, as he was proud of his muscle power. I had seen many feuds between some of the other owners of the 'commonwealth' and us but none of the earlier feuds had done us as much harm as Seera's consistency was doing. Moreover, earlier there used to be long gaps between these feuds. Now, after we had purchased the portion of Hoomi and Basa, Seera had become very aggressive and had started doing us genuine harm. He seemed to be trying to nullify what we had gained by purchasing a little area of land.

I was no more a child in 1961. I was nineteen years old. And I had started feeling that Seera had done to us real harm. I had also started feeling that he had done that because he had more muscle power than anybody in our family. I also felt I was no match to him. But I found it difficult to tolerate my father's repeated humiliations. So I decided to retaliate in case there was any new move from Seera. Better death than dishonor! And God soon provided me an opportunity to do what I wanted to.

One day when I was back from my school, as at that time I was working as a teacher, I was told that father had gone to the garden to bring forage for our animals. I too went to help him. When I reached the garden, I found that Seera had dug a water channel to his field through our part of the garden without caring even to seek father's permission. He could have dug it through his own field too, but he chose to use our land for the purpose, not his own. That signified that his expansionist designs were not yet over and he was still looking at our land with a vulture's eyes. At the moment when I reached the garden, Father was trying to convince Seera and his brother that they should have at least taken father's permission before digging the channel. After all they were not the owners of the land in which they dug the channel. But neither he nor Gulloo was willing to be convinced. They argued that the garden was a *brijmal patta*, the commonwealth of all the five owners, and that they had the right to re-partition it whenever they liked and howsoever they liked. This was tantamount to saying that since they had the might, they had the right to snatch any part of our land, and since we were lacking in the might, we had not the right even to own what was ours.

Which man with blood in his veins can tolerate this?

"I'll brave each one of these people!" These words were the spontaneous overflow of my powerful feeling.

"Here starts her drama goddess Kali!" This was Seera's taunt.

I slapped Gulloo hard when he came to me to bring it home to me that the garden was a *brijmal patta*, a commonwealth.

The next half an hour witnessed what can be described as free-for-all -- a free use of muscle power from both sides. I was the only person fighting on behalf of my family. Opposed to me there were Gulloo, Seera, Seera's son Pamoo, Gol, and Balloo's son Goonga. Everybody was trying to make the optimum use of his muscle power. Blows were exchanged, fists were bartered, even teeth were used, Seera used his sickle too. My father went on making an appeal to all to halt. The last scene of the picture was that Seera had over-powered me, had pinned me down to the ground, and was seated on my chest hitting my cheeks with the handle of his sickle. Even if he had used the blade of the sickle there was none to stop him. I was not sorry. I had tried to protect our property with all my might. If my might was not adequate, I was not to blame.

When the scuffling came to the end, my father pushed me away from the field and I was away from the scene for about half an hour. I tried to find which parts of my body had been hurt. My mouth was aching. I thought my mouth was full of saliva. I tried to spit it out: it was red. I do not know how the information about this incident reached my mother and when she reached the garden, she was shouting at my father, "Why don't you let this property be set ablaze? Shall we sacrifice our son for the ownership of this kingdom of yours?" At that time I had re-entered and was back on the stage.

Father knew that the root of the problem was as to who should possess how much of this 'commonwealth'. Seera wanted his land to expand but our interests lay in frustrating his attempts. So scuffles were inevitable.

When we were back home, there began the post mortem of the incident. We had as many, if not more, sympathizers as they had. Some of their sympathizers came to harass us. Some of our sympathizers came to console us, some others came to suggest what else we should have done and what precautions we should have taken before resolving to use force to achieve our goal. I was told I should have done some home work before resolving to open the fight. My father thought and thought over the problem and resolved that the only safe way out of the situation was that he should sell his share of the commonwealth.

And he did. He sold it to Satti, the son of a friend of his. Satti gave my father the impression that he was in total sympathy with us and that he would help us against Seera in case we needed it. But Satti instantly sold the land he had purchased from us to Seera with the result that Seera got our land the day we sold it. This is how Seera and Gulloo became the owners of the whole garden minus the portion owned by Gol and Balloo. Their total land-holdings were about twenty bighas now and they could claim equality with the other land-owners living at the village.

And this is how we became a family having no landed property. Seera had succeeded in pushing us out of the garden. His will was done. We had failed altogether in retaining even what was originally ours. Since we had no other land-holdings in the village we felt we had no status there. So soon afterwards we left Sampoornanagar and shifted to Jahangirabad in search of new pastures. My father always wanted us to become professionals. And all the three of us became professionals: I focused my attention on studies and became a writer-cum-professor, the second of us became an automobile-driver, and the third became an accounts officer. After a few years' stay in Jahangirabad, all the three of us shifted to three different towns: I shifted to Hapur, Kavindra shifted to Muradnagar, and Guru Dutta shifted to Meerut.

After a gap of about twenty years one day I found myself being driven through Sampoornanagar. I wanted to have a look at what used to be our garden. I wanted to see my favourite khirni tree, the jamboo tree which had helped me increase my height, the mango tree I used to describe as Lakhpat, and the mango tree we used to call chenpia. I asked the driver to stop the car and let me walk for a while. He stopped the car and I was down on the road. I asked the driver to wait for me at the bridge of the canal and he drove away. I passed through Sampoornanagar studying the faces I saw and tried to see whether I was able to identify any of them. I was able to recognize only one face, but I failed to recollect the man's name. There was no trace of the garden: there were wheat fields all around. Seera must have cut all those trees long ago.

✠✠✠

I REGAINED MY PURSE

I had money in the form of Dollars but I needed in the form of Yemeni Rials. So I went to the Jazira Exchange to get it converted. The office was only modestly crowded and I did not have to wait long. When I was in the queue, I was holding my wallet in my right hand. I was also holding my yellow cloth bag to carry vegetables in from the market on my way back home. In the Exchange there were only two counters, one facing the door, and the other facing the eastern wall of the Exchange.

As I was waiting for my turn (I was only one customer away from the counter), the official at the second counter asked me what he could do for me. I told him I wanted to get Rials for my Dollars. He was pleased to get my Dollars and gave me a fat bundle of Rial notes. I took the money, and counted the notes very carefully. Some of the notes were smudgy. A few of them had been victims of wear and tear of long and careless use. But they were mm -- acceptable. I put them in my pocket even more carefully. I was happy I was leaving the Exchange with my money intact. After all, those were the days when unfortunate incidents of cheating were not rare. I thanked the official and he thanked me in return.

As I stepped out of the Exchange, I asked myself once again whether all my possessions were intact. My yellow cloth bag was still with me. My bundle of Rials was very much there in my pocket. But where was my wallet? I plunged my hand hurriedly from one pocket to another. It had disappeared without leaving any trace behind. I remembered I had been holding it in my hand when I had been waiting for my turn in the queue. But it was not there in either of my hands now. 'Where had I put it?' I asked myself. It was not there in any of the pockets. It was not there in my cloth bag. 'Where else could it be?' asked I once again. I asked myself a number of questions. But I could recollect nothing about my wallet.

I started thinking of various possibilities. When I had been counting the notes I had focused my attention only on counting them and every thing else had slipped out of my mind for a few moments. I must have put the wallet then on the projection of the counter jutting outwards or I must have dropped it on the floor. I hurried into the Exchange to see whether

the wallet was still there on the projection or lying somewhere on the floor. But there was no trace of the wallet. I searched for it in my pockets once again to make myself doubly sure that it was not there. It was actually not there. Still I was not prepared to believe I had lost my wallet.

I tried to convince myself that I had lost my wallet and it was futile to bother my head about it any more. But though vanquished I was arguing still. I was still inside the Exchange looking for my wallet all around. It was not there anywhere on the floor. It was not there on the walls. It was not there up the ceiling. There was nothing like the wallet anywhere in the room. As I was searching my pockets once again I saw a man sitting in a chair behind me. He appeared to be curious to know why I was searching my pockets repeatedly. I too wanted to ask him if he knew anything about my purse. But I did not know Arabic and he knew no English. So there was no conversation between us.

As soon as the last customer left "my" counter I asked the official there whether I had left my wallet somewhere around the counter. But he too, perhaps, did not understand English and, so, he, instead of answering my question, turned his forefinger towards the other official who was able to speak and understand English. I turned my eyes to the official who had given me Rials for my Dollars. But this official was busy talking to a customer. As a matter of fact the customer he was talking to appeared to be his friend as both of them were speaking quite loudly and were laughing at each other's remarks. So I had to wait so that when there was a comma or a semi-colon in their conversation, I might address my question to him. But they had started talking with a renewed vigour and I was getting impatient. And then they laughed with a still more forceful vigour doubly renewed. How to draw the official's attention towards me in such a situation?

In the mean time I happened to turn my eyes towards two persons closely examining something. They were standing halfway between me and the door. What was it that they were examining? It was something black. The elderly man, who must have been about forty years old, was holding the thing in his hand. A boy of about fourteen was peeping into it with a focused attention. In fact he was all eyes at the moment. The black thing was the same size as my purse about six inches long, and about four inches wide. I rushed towards them. It was my wallet!

I recollected that only one solitary green note of fifty Rials had been left in it. The rest of the notes had left its company long ago. It also contained about a dozen small slips bearing mobile phone numbers,

land-line phone numbers, addresses and grocery items I needed in my kitchen. The man holding the wallet was turning the slips this way and that, trying to find, perhaps, whether the wallet contained the owner's photograph or address so that he might trace the owner and hand it over to him. Perhaps, it was the boy who had handed the wallet over to him.

I too looked at the wallet for a second once again. Yes it was my wallet. To find me standing there looking at the wallet, the two persons raised their eyes towards me to know whether I had something to do with the wallet. With a smile on my face, I nodded to signify that the wallet was mine. I also extended my hand for them to hand it over to me.

The marks of tension earlier visible on the elderly man's face disappeared at once and he heaved a sigh of relief. He handed over the wallet to me instantly with a smile on his face signifying thereby that in future I should not forget to collect my wallet if I happened to put it somewhere outside my pocket. I took the wallet and gratefully thanked the two once again.

The moment I was out of the Exchange, I stopped and took the wallet out of my bag to check its contents. The fifty Rial note was still there as safe as ever. I thanked God and resumed my homeward walk.

✠✠✠

I TRUSTED THEM AND LOST TWO HUNDRED RUPEES

On the third of August 2012 I received a missed call. Like a simpleton I decided to call back. I was curious to know from which person the call had come and what its contents were. In its reply I heard a lady's voice. She told me she was a representative of the Air Tel Company and was speaking from Singapur. She told me that an Air Tel lottery draw had gone in my favour and that I was going to get an amount of Rs. 25,00,000. She asked me whether my Air Tel mobile phone was pre-paid or post-paid. I told her that it was pre-paid. She asked me for how much money I had got it recharged. I told her that I did not remember. She asked me from where I was speaking. I told her I was Brahma Dutta Sharma speaking from Hapur, a town in India.

"We have been trying to contact you for several days. The money has been sent and it has gone into the account of Swagat (?) Sharma. Contact him and get this money from him. Note down his phone number," said she.

"Yes, tell me his number," said I.

"His number is 00923064211118. Also note down the lottery number," said she.

"Yes, tell me the lottery number," said I.

"Your lottery number is 89910; and the fa--- number is 0397. Call Swagat Sharma immediately," instructed she.

"Why will Swagat Sharma transfer any money into my account until you ask him to do that?" asked I.

"We are asking him to do that. But you have to contact him," said she.

" O.K. I'll contact him," said I.

I noted down the number of the lady too. It was +923366677600. I knew that the code number of India was 0091. So what was certain was that both these persons belonged to some country other than India. Since I did not know the code number of Singapur, I was not sure whether the calls had come from Singapur.

I dialed the number of Swagat Sharma and he responded instantly.

"I am Brahma Dutta Sharma from Hapur, India," said I.

"Which place?" asked he.

"Hapur. It is in India," said I.

"I am also speaking from India. But where is this place?" said he.

"It is ----," said I.

"Is it in U.P.?" asked he.

"Yes. I have been told by a lady from Singapur that the draw of a lottery has gone in my favour. She has told me the details of the lottery. Has she conveyed anything to you?" asked I.

"What's your name?" asked he.

"It's Brahma Dutta Sharma, the lottery number is 89910 and the fnumber is 0397," said I.

"Brahma Dutta Sharma? Yes, a draw has gone in your favour. Don't you view the T.V.? Didn't you see your name on the Star T.V.? It has been announced by several T.V. channels. Give me your bank account number and I'll transfer Rs. 25,00,000 into it.

At this point the phone was disconnected. I tried to ring him up again but I was told from the Air Tel office that I did not have sufficient balance for the call. That meant I had lost Rs. one hundred in these two calls. When I was planning to go to the Air Tel dealer to get my phone recharged the man rang me up and told me that the phone had been disconnected because my balance stood exhausted. He asked me to get my phone recharged for Rs. 550.

"Don't reveal this fact of the lottery-draw to anybody at all. Get your phone recharged and call me back within fifteen to twenty minutes," said he.

I asked myself whether I was really going to get Rs. twenty-five lakh. I had already lost one hundred rupees. I decided to consult Mrs. Sharma.

" If I call this man again, I may be losing still more money. I have lost this money because I trusted this lady. Should I trust this gentleman too?" asked I

"If you save one hundred rupees you are going to miss this opportunity to get twenty-five lakh. Better try your luck and spend one hundred rupees more," said she.

Greed overpowered me at this stage and I took my bicycle to go to the market. On my way to the market I was lost in a day dream: I was planning how I would spend this amount of Rs. twenty-five lakh. I resolved to give a share to my younger son so that he might pay back the house loan he had taken from the L.I.C.

When I was back home I dialled Swagat Sharma's number. He made me wait for a minute and then responded.

"Did you get your mobile recharged?" asked he.

"Yes, I did," said I.

"For how much money did you get it recharged?" asked he.

"For five hundred and fifty rupees," said I.

"That's good. Now tell me your account number and the name of the bank in which you have your account. I'll transfer twenty-five lakh Rupees into your account. In which bank do you have your account?" said he.

"My account is there in State Bank of India," said I. I also told him the address of the bank.

"Is there a branch of ICICI Bank in Hapur?" asked he.

"No, ICICI Bank has no branch in our town," said I.

Then I told him my account number.

"Go to the bank immediately and remit Rs. 21200 in the account the number of which I'll tell you when you reach the bank. How much is your balance in this account of yours?" said he.

"I don't remember," said I.

"I believe it is more than Rs. 500?" asked he.

"Yes, it is more than Rs. 500" said I.

"How much time will you take to reach the bank?"asked he.

"I shall be there in, at the most, fifteen minutes," said I.

"Do not disclose anything about this lottery-draw to anyone. If they come to know of this, you will have to pay the tax. Thou art a poverty-stricken man. I do not want thee to be taxed unnecessarily, " said he.

"O.K." said I.

"Take with you your Bank Pass-book, your voter's card, and a

photograph of yours. Do you have the voter's card?" said he.

"Yes, I have it," said I.

"Note down these numbers: the file number is 555874409. You have to remit Rs. 21200 in the account the number of which I shall tell you when you reach the bank. This is security money. Note down the PIN code. It is 88333sbi.comicici and the slip number is 25lakh 50000 return. Hurry up and I'LL transfer Rs. 25,00,000 into your account. After you have deposited the security money in the account the number of which I shall convey to you, wait outside the bank," said he.

I noted down all the numbers and codes he had asked me to note down. But I wondered why he wanted me to remit Rs. 21200 as no property was going to be entrusted to me to take care of. I also wondered why he wanted me to wait outside the bank. I wondered whether there I might become the victim of some kind of assault.

This pushed avarice out of my mind and made me interpret the incidents in a different light. I suspected that the man wanted to rob me of at least Rs. 21200. However, I was still talking to him.

"Tell me the account number now as here I am at home and can note it down carefully so that no error is committed," said I.

"No, no, I'll tell you the number only when you reach the bank and ring me up from there. And also take with you an amount of Rs. 21200 to remit as security," said he.

"Why do you want me to remit this security money? " asked I.

"This security money has to be deposited. In case thou dost not want to remit this money, discontinue this call," said he.

Now I had no choice but to discontinue the call. Thus came to the ground the whole edifice of my plan to use this amount of twenty-five lakh rupees. I read my balance of my mobile phone and came to know that I had again lost an amount of Rs. one hundred.

✠✠✠

I WAS HURT

Chandan was able to do only matriculation. So it was a real problem to find a job for him. A white collar job is not easy to get India. If there is one vacancy, there are hundreds of applications. However, like many other boys of the village, he soon decided to join the army. There they trained him for the job of a motor mechanic. Chandan worked there for a few years and he seemed to be happy with his lot. But one fine day he decided to leave the army and came back home. By this time he had decided to work as a car- driver. And soon he got the job. This doomed him to lead a life of modest means. Many persons who saw his standard of living reported to me that Chandan was leading a life of abject poverty and was finding it difficult to make both ends meet. My mother usually talked of his low standard of living. And so did my younger maternal uncle. But I knew it was bound to be so as Chandan had poor academic qualification and would not be able to get a better paid job. I believed he would fail as a trader too. So I made no efforts to persuade him to switch to trading.

Nevertheless, I wanted to do something for him. After all he was my brother and as a brother it was my duty to help him financially too and to see that if I was not facing any financial problems he too should not face any economic hardships. I believed that this step of mine would please my parents. Those were the days when I did almost everything in order to please my parents and to win from them a pat on my back. Since it was not possible to arrange a better-paid job for him, I decided to do something to ensure for him some sort of financial security for his old age. Those were the days when I was able to save some money regularly and was trying to find out how it could be invested best. I resolved to let Chandan also be benefitted by some of my savings and some of the information I had gathered about Indian government's schemes of investment for the members of the modest income groups.

First I decided to get Chandan's life insured. And when Chandan came to Hapur one day, I called Dayanand, the Life Insurance Corporation agent, and asked him to insure Chandan's life. Dayanand called Manohar Lal Bharati, the Development Officer, and all the formalities were completed. Chandan did not raise any objection. Nor

did he ask any questions. He signed the application form when he was asked to do that. Dayanand asked me to pay him the premium so that he might deposit it in the Corporation office and I gave him a cheque for the relevant amount. Chandan did not even offer to pay.

Those were the days when a fierce fight was going on between the then two factions of the Congress Party, namely, Congress Party (Indira Gandhi) and Congress Party (Syndicate), Morarji Desai had resigned as Finance Minister, fourteen banks had been nationalized, and the nationalized banks were advancing loans to people like taxi-drivers to buy their own vehicles. I decided to let Chandan have the benefits of this policy of the banks.

I approached the Meerut branch of the Syndicate Bank and arranged a loan for Chandan so that he might buy a car. I had to take Mr. Bharati's help in doing that. The Syndicate Bank advanced a loan to Chandan on the condition that 30 percent of the sale price would be arranged by Chandan and 70 percent of it would be paid by the Bank. Chandan was not in a position to arrange even thirty percent of the price. I expected father to arrange that amount of money. But Chandan told me that father had refused to pay him anything. I gave him Rupees 2000 from my own pocket and wrote to father to give him Rupees eight thousand. Some money was arranged by Chandan's wife too. I have forgotten how much. Perhaps she gave Rupees one thousand. And Chandan got the car.

This car made Chandan an important man overnight. He was the most sought-out member of our family. Every morning there was a new man asking for Chandan. Chandan was the first man in our family to own a car. So everybody in the family was proud of him. Mother talked of him a great deal; Chandan's wife was no more displeased with him; and father started recognizing merits in his behaviour. Father went to the extent of writing a poem eulogizing Chandan's achievements. The family had gained what nobody had ever imagined to gain. A very long cherished dream had come true!

The members of the family talked most of the time how they had become the owners of a very valuable possession. They started making various kinds of plans: sometimes they talked of going to a place of pilgrimage; sometimes they talked of the riches the car would bring to them; sometimes they talked of the efforts they had made in order to gain this four-wheeler.

One day mother and Chandan's wife were discussing the issue. Some

of the sentences they uttered were the following ones:

> "It was my son Karunesh who arranged the money and it was with that money that we were able to get the car. So we should give the whole credit to him," said my mother.
>
> "Which son of yours? Which son of yours arranged the money? It was I who arranged the money. How would you have managed to buy the car if I had not given your son my money?" retorted Chandan's wife Lakshmi.

And mother became silent.

One day I went home. I heard father and mother discussing the matter. Some of the sentences they uttered are still there in my memory. They were like this:

"Karunesh has been helping Chandan and the rest of the family a great deal. It was he who arranged the loan for Chandan's car. It was he who paid for Amar's education. It was he who paid money even to get Chandan's life insured," said my mother.

"No, it is not so. Karunesh got commission from the Life Insurance Corporation for getting Chandan's life insured. So he got Chandan's life insured in order to earn money for his own self. He did not spend any money at all. Everybody has his self-interest in mind. Nobody is foolish enough to spend money for another," was my father's retort.

I never worked as an agent of the Life Insurance Corporation. Even father knew that. How could I get any commission on getting Chandan's life insured? But I did not like to ask my father any question of the kind. I heard his sentence and resolved to keep mum. I did nothing to disillusion him. But did he actually believe that I was helping Chandan because I was getting money for myself? Can perceptions differ from reality so much? I said nothing to anybody, but I was genuinely hurt. I felt I was destined not to be appreciated. But was I destined to be depreciated too? Is it really one's destiny that decides whether one will get profit or face loss, whether one is going to survive or to die, whether one's work is going to be appreciated or to be depreciated?

✠✠✠

ILL-PLACED LOYALTIES

Chandra refused to accept the examination forms. He said that the deadline had been left behind and he was not authorized to accept any application form after the last date declared for the purpose had expired. The student-leaders who were pressurizing him to accept the examination forms included Sanjoo and Mannoo. When Mannoo saw that all his tactics, tantrums and theatrical devices had failed, he slapped Chandra on his left cheek and left his office.

Chandra was the Registrar of the University. He belonged to the plains. And in the hills people from the plains were regarded as bulls in a China shop. Nobody had any sympathy for them and the hill-people became really glad when they heard that a man from the plains had been humiliated. Why it was so is a question on which I am not in a mood to say anything now. Chandra was a Provincial Civil Service officer and had been sent to the Himalayan University as its Registrar just a few months before. Formerly he was working as an Additional District Magistrate of the District of Meerut. He had not reached the post from the ranks as a result of promotions on the basis of seniority and length of service. So he was not much submissive. On many an issue he took a stand and stood by it.

It was unusual for the students to be told flatly that no form was going to be accepted after the last date. For them there was no last date. Many Heads went on giving admission to students till the day on which examinations commenced. They simply wrote some date of July or August on the form and the fee clerk also went on issuing receipts bearing some acceptable back date. Earlier there had occurred cases when the forms were accepted not only on the day examinations started but also after that. Some students first took the examination and then submitted their examination forms. They had been living in a very different kind of system - a system in which whatever they said was accepted. So it was very queer to them to hear somebody talk of the last date.

Ordinary students of the university were not disobedient, but the

behaviour of the student-leaders was often shocking. This was so that year too. Actually it was difficult to decide as to which of those student-leaders of the Himalayan university was the most unruly. All of them indulged in the same kind of activities: they tried to force the strict admission committees to admit students after the deadline had expired; they tried to compel the Registrar to accept the examination forms after the last day had been left behind; they went on hunger strikes against the Director shortly before the date of the elections for the students' union was going to be announced with the hope that this would ensure their victory in the elections; they locked the offices of the authorities whenever they liked and declared a lock-out as if they were the owners of the factory called the Himalayan University and the teachers were workers in their private factory. Their demands were invariably unacceptable but they expected the authorities to behave like their obedient slaves. Yet Mannoo was, perhaps, the worst of them. He could say anything, as well as do anything.

Chandra was not able to tolerate the humiliation and went to the police station where he lodged a First Information Report against Mannoo. The police officials were prompt in their action and a warrant to arrest Mannoo was signed. Himalayapur was not a big town and almost everybody knew everybody else. So we hoped Mannoo would be arrested within hours of the issuance of the warrant of arrest. But when the day was over, the police officer declared that Mannoo had gone under-ground and that he was still untraceable. The second day came and was gone, but Mannoo was untraceable. The same thing happened the third day and the same thing happened the fourth day. Where had Mannoo gone? Had he crossed over to Nepal? Had he vanished into thin air? There were so many questions, but there was no answer. The police officials simply said that they were unable to untie the mystery.

Chandra succeeded in getting himself transferred back to the plains soon after this incident and in course of time people forgot him and the episode related to Mannoo. I continued to acquaint myself with the postings and transfers of Chandra as we belonged to the same town.

The students' union held its annual function a few weeks after this incident. They invited Saxena, the District Magistrate of the district of Himalayapur, as the chief guest. One of the students who made a speech on this occasion was Mannoo. He said a number of things in praise of Mr. Saxena. A few of the sentences he spoke on the occasion had the following sense:

"I have no words to describe how good Mr. Saxena is. And I can never forget what Mr. Saxena did for me. It was he who kept me concealed in his car when the police of Himalayapur were going from house to house in order to arrest me, as Registrar Chandra had lodged an F.I.R. against me. If Saxena ji had not helped me, Registrar Chandra would have seen to it that I was behind the bars. It is due to Mr. Saxena's goodness that I not only escaped arrest but also enjoyed the privileges of a V.I.P. for about ten days. I left Saxenaji's residence only when the case against me had been withdrawn."

I was reminded of a speech of Chaudhary Charan Singh: "Once an Indian and a Russian were talking about their respective countries. The Russian said, "The Russian police are very efficient: if there happens a case of robbery anywhere in Russia today, our police will definitely come to know all its details by tomorrow evening." At this the Indian said, "The police of our country are much more efficient than yours: if a robbery is going to be committed tomorrow anywhere in India, the police officer protecting that area knows all its details today."

Which criminal can the police arrest if there exist in the country District Magistrates like Saxena?

✠✠✠

IS BREAD ALONE NOT ENOUGH?

None of us can do without bread, no doubt, but we can do without butter. And we should do without it in case we cannot afford to buy it. Why should we not avoid getting kicks if they necessarily accompany butter? But many of us do not agree with me. I have seen people who will not do without butter even if they have to welcome kicks on their foreheads when they are trying to get it. No doubt, they believe themselves to be prudent, nay even wise, but they have yet to know that there also exists, what is popularly known as, 'holding one's head high'.

Madhu was a Ph.D. and taught Hindi in a post-graduate college. She had married an allopathic doctor having the degree of M.B.B.S. These facts will give one the impression that they were a well-to-do family and were free from financial worries. After all India is a land where allopathic doctors have endeared themselves to the people a great deal and, consequently, they earn a lot of money. And teachers working in post-graduate colleges too are very well-paid persons. So even if one of the couple is a doctor or a lecturer in a post-graduate college, the family can afford to live very comfortably. If each of the two members constituting a family is earning a handsome amount of money they should not quarrel over financial matters.

But I would like to tell you what happened inside a branch of the Syndicate Bank one day. Dr. Gupta, Madhu's husband, brought Madhu on his scooter to the college branch of the bank. They entered the bank and Madhu handed over a cheque to the cashier at the 'Payment' counter. The cashier examined the cheque, checked the signature, wrote something on the cheque, and took out a bundle of bank notes from a drawer of the table. He counted them. He took some of them out of the bundle and put the rest in the drawer back. He handed over the bundle of notes to Madhu. Madhu took the bundle from the cashier and counted the notes. But instead of putting them in her purse she threw the bundle into the hands of her husband contemptuously. Yes, *contemptuously*!

And Dr. Gupta clutched the bundle, put it in his pocket, kicked the starter of the scooter, put himself on its seat and drove back to the town

leaving his wife behind to lecture in the college and earn for him another bundle of bank-notes next month. He had received money and did not mind the kick.

It is not difficult to imagine the quarrel that had taken place between the husband and the wife over the ownership of the money that Madhu was earning by teaching. It is not unnatural for a wife to claim ownership over the money she has earned. But there are husbands who claim to have complete ownership of the whole property of the family, irrespective of the consideration as to who has earned how much. If Anil Gupta had allowed his wife to keep in her possession the money she had earned he would have, no doubt, lost some portion of the money that the family possessed and would have, perhaps, deprived himself of the butter for his bread, but he would have definitely escaped receiving a kick on his forehead in public.

✠✠✠

JUST A SARI AND A RING

"Bring just a sari and a ring," said Rajbal. "We want you to bring nothing else. Just come as you are."

Rajbal was the elder brother of the girl whose marriage was being negotiated. He was the head of that family as his father had died long ago. He was accompanied by his cousin Rambhool, and the husband of his eldest sister Deo Raj. Our side was represented by father alone. Father also was a very talkative man, but that day most of the talking was being done by the persons of that side.

"There is no need to spend money on ornaments, valuable clothes, attractive show and all that. Bring all your friends and relatives but their number should not exceed thirty so that I am able to entertain them properly," added Rajbal.

I was still a student depending even for my bread on my parents. Just two months before I had joined the college to do a two-year degree course and was going to remain a student for at least two years more. Nay, I was only fifteen-and-a-half and since jobs were given those days not before one was eighteen, it was certain that for two-and-a-half years I was not going to get any job. If father was hesitating in saying "No" I should have done that. But I thought I had no right to say anything and kept mum. This was a blunder of mine I committed in 1957 A.D. and I regret it even today in the year 2012.

Father was still in the state of pendulum, not being able to decide whether to say "Yes" or to say "No" in spite of what Rajbal had said. At last mother revealed to him that she had an amount of seven hundred rupees with her and that she would give this money to father in case the marriage was going to be fixed. This revelation removed all hesitations from father's mind and he uttered a forceful "Yes."

In those days the price of gold was one hundred rupees per ten grams. So for seven hundred we could buy seventy grams of gold. That much of gold would enable us to get seven gold ornaments manufactured. This much of jewellery was rarely gifted to a bride in our region. Father approached a goldsmith of Jahangirabad and we got seven ornaments of

gold. Both my parents were happy to have so many ornaments of the yellow metal. They thought that the girl who was expecting nothing but a ring would dance with joy on getting so much jewellery.

Father spent money, in his opinion, lavishly to make the appearance of the marriage party look attractive: he arranged attractive vehicles, the best singer of our village to recite famous historical incidents, a band of musicians and also a gramophone which was reciting film songs of various kinds. He hoped Rajbal's joy would know no bounds to have such an attractive marriage party.

But unwelcome reports began to reach us soon after we had reached the *janwasa*: the girl's mother had become furious to see such a poorly equipped marriage party; there were no crackers, no fire-works, no Catherine wheels; the members of the marriage party were not gaily clad. She was reported to be fuming. She had declared herself of having been cheated. Or, rather, robbed What would have happened if we had taken with us just a ring and a sari? Rajbal had gone out of the picture altogether.

When we were back home, my mother asked Divya, "Was your mother happy to see the jewellery we have given to you?"

"Shakuntala got a gold waist-band from her in-laws. Mine is just silver," replied Divya.

"Who is Shakuntala?" asked my mother.

"The daughter of my front-door neighbour in our village," replied Divya.

Like her mother she had conveniently forgotten her brother's words "Bring just a ring and a sari" uttered at our residence two months before. The tension caused by the remark about Shakuntala's gold waist-band still persists in the house.

✠✠✠

MILK HEALED HIM

Ram Prakash had become quite bulky when he retired from service at the age of sixty though he had been quite active in his youth and cycled several miles every day. Maybe his fondness for edibles like curd had made him bulky. One day when rain had made the floor of his house slippery he slipped and fell on the ground with a heavy thud. He tried to lift himself instantly but he found it very difficult to move even to his bed. He was feeling severe pain in his hip and he felt his hip was swelling fast. Ram Prakash approached an allopathic doctor and he advised him to get his hip x-rayed. The x-ray report revealed that the fall had caused multiple fractures in his hip bone. Keeping this fact in view the doctor prescribed surgical treatment. Ram Prakash hesitated not a little but since the doctor had declared that a surgical operation was inevitable Ram Prakash agreed to be operated upon.

The operation was successful and the doctor told that his hip bone was soon going to become whole. Then came the question of the post-operation care. The doctor advised Ram Prakash to become an egg-eater at least, if not a flesh-eater, as at his advanced age of sixty-two he needed calcium-rich diet so that the broken bone might regain its near-original wholeness. But Ram Prakash refused to budge from the stand he had taken and declared that he was not going to eat either flesh or eggs whatever happened to his hip bone.

"I belong to the vegetarian high caste of Agrawals, rather than to any of the flesh-eating castes. I may die but I shall not deprive any animal of its life in order to keep myself alive. Flesh-eating is nothing but killing an animal to keep oneself alive. I am not going to commit this sin. When I ask myself whether I would like an animal to eat me up in order to keep itself alive, I become conscious of the monstrosity of the sin of flesh-eating. My conscience does not permit me to become either a non-vegetarian or an egg-eatarian," said he.

"Eggs are very rich in calcium and you need much calcium for the broken pieces of your hip bone to get joined again. Unless you eat calcium-rich diet, your hip-bone may not become whole again," said the doctor.

It is very difficult for a patient to say, "No" when a doctor prescribes

something for the former. A doctor's advice turned my simple friend Buddha Sen into an egg-eatarian when the latter was declared to have been suffering from tuberculosis. Likewise, Hari Narain Dixit, when he had undergone an appendicitis operation, became a flesh-eater when he was told by a doctor that flesh-eating would enable him to recover fast. A doctor's statement is regarded by most people as a sacred text. But Ram Prakash had the boldness to reject the doctor's advice and declared that he would continue to be a vegetarian, whatever might be the odds.

"The body has to die one day, but the soul is immortal. I shall not defile my immortal soul for the protection of my mortal body," declared he.

"How will you be able to supply calcium to your body as it needs calcium for recovery?" asked the doctor.

"I drink milk. Milk is quite rich in calcium. I shall consume two kilograms of milk every day," declared he.

The doctor felt vanquished and had to keep mum.

When the plaster was removed after a month or so, the doctor got the hip x-rayed again. The doctor was surprised to find that the hip bone of Ram Prakash was as whole as it could be. He smiled and patted the back of Ram Prakash.

"Ram Prakash, your hip bone now is as good as the original one. Congratulations!" said the doctor.

"Milk is really rich in calcium. Isn't it, doctor?" said Ram Prakash.

"Yes, it is a proven truth now," responded the doctor.

✠✠✠

NOT HIS FATHER ANY MORE

II shall call him Ram Bihari. He was a teacher and knew the value of education. He worked hard and earned money enough to build a house at Muzaffarnagar. He tried to rise in his profession and by degrees became Principal Teacher of an intermediate college. Those were the times when the post of a Principal Teacher was considered very high. I am talking of the days when the number of intermediate colleges in Uttar Pradesh was not large, there being very few degree colleges in the state. And Ram Bihari got this post in the city of Lucknow, the capital of the state.

Ram Bihari saw to it that his son got admission in the best educational institution available. I shall call this son Harinaam. Harinaam was intelligent enough to do well in his examinations and earned the Master's degree in English. In those it was not easy to get through the examination of M.A. English. Many tried but very few succeeded. Since English was a compulsory subject at the degree level and adequately qualified persons were not available easily, almost every degree college was in need of a lecturer in English. So Harinaam did not face much difficulty in finding a job: he got an appointment letter from a college of Saharanpur. He would have preferred a college of Muzaffarnagar, but even Saharanpur was not far and he joined the college. A daily up-and-down to Saharanpur was not very cumbersome.

Ram Bihari was living in Lucknow itself because Lucknow was far from Muzaffarnagar. Even Express trains took fifteen hours to reach Lucknow from Muzaffarnagar. So Ram Bihari came to Muzaffarnagar only twice a month and left the responsibility of taking care of his house to Harinaam. However, he looked forward to the day when after his retirement he would be back in Muzaffarnagar and would be in a position to take care of his house and to be in the company of his son and his grand children. He was keen to communicate his experiences to his son and his grand children. He wished he was in a position to stay with his grand children and help them in learning their lessons and in preparing themselves for their examinations. He believed that his long experience of teaching had equipped him with the techniques of endearing the subjects of study to his students and he wanted to use those techniques as

a grandfather too. He was aware of the fact that Harinaam was fully engrossed in his professional and academic work with the result that he had little time to spare for his children. Ram Bihari believed he was in a position to make his grand children realize that their subjects of study were easy and interesting, not difficult and boring. He harboured the opinion that the greatest property one could give to his children was his time.

But the years were passing very slowly: a year took full three hundred and sixty days and six hours to pass and everyday was twenty-four hours long. Ram Bihari was impatient to be back with his son and grand children.

An hour takes full sixty minutes to end, no doubt, but it does end at last. Howsoever long a period may be, it does end one day. And there arrived at last the last session of Ram Bihari's service. He was overjoyed to find that just after a year he would be with his son and grand children and the family reunion would make all of them happy. He told Harinaam several times that the days of their living together were not far. He started making plans how he would help his son in solving the problems the members of his family were facing, how by making a few modifications in their eating habits he would make them have more nourishing food, and how he would make his son's work light by taking many of his responsibilities on his own shoulders. He was imagining most of the time how happy his son would feel on having his father with him.

****

It was the winter of 1976 (?). I was in Hyderabad. And so was Harinaam. We were staying in the same boarding house. We were there in connection with our research activities. One day when Harinaam and I were on our way to the American Studies Research Centre Harinaam told me that he would soon be shifting to Saharanpur.

"Why? You will have to take a house on rent there. In Muzaffarnagar you are living in your own house. What is the point in leaving your own house and becoming a tenant? Living in the house you own is like living in your castle. Living in a rented house keeps you in a mood of temporariness. No house in the world is as good as the house you own," said I.

"Sharma ji, my father is retiring this year in June and will come back home in July. So I have to vacate this house for him. This house belongs to my father, not to me," said Harinaam.

"I do not understand. If your father is coming back home, you should be happy. You will again get an opportunity to live with your father and have the advantage of being under an umbrella figure," said I.

At this Harinaam said, "You do not understand, Sharma ji. The fact is that an old man becomes senile and his behaviour becomes abnormal. So it becomes impossible to adjust with him. It is impossible to bear with an old man's whims and idiosyncrasies."

"Dr. Harinaam, he is your father and he will be protecting you in case you choose to live with him. He will like to live with you and help you in various ways," said I

"Yes, I know my father will like to live with me in the same house. Actually he is coming back to Muzaffarnagar so that we live together. But how can I live with a senile old man?" said Harinaam.

This gave me a *satori*. Now for Harinaam Ram Bihari was a senile old man, not his father.

✠✠✠

OUR PILGRIMAGE TO SHRI AWANTIKA JI

This is evening now. We have come back from Shri Awantika Devi temple of Ahar. Ahar is not far from the native village of my husband. We go to this temple to pray to our family goddess to bless the newly married couple of the family with children who must honour the traditions of the family and the ideals the family cherishes. We also take every child born in the family to this temple to get the blessings of Shri Awantika ji. We believe that goddess Awantika ji will never fail us howsoever unworthy of her grace we may be. I remember I took my eldest son to Awantika ji in order to pray to her to shower her blessings on him when he was hardly a week old. And Awantika ji has always been kind to me. As a matter of fact she has showered more grace on me than I deserve. It was with her grace that I was blessed with two sons either of whom is a jewel for me.

The temple I am talking about is very ancient and existed even in the days of Lord Krishna and the Pandavas though it must have been rejuvenated since then several times. It is believed that Rukmani ji was worshipping Shri Awantika ji in this temple when Lord Krishna came to marry her. There also exists near this temple a tank known as the Rukmani Kund. It is believed that this girl Rukmani whom Lord Krishna married and whom he made his chief queen was the daughter of King Kundan, the then king of Ahar which was known as Kundanpur in those days. If we look at the village from the bank of the Ganga we find that old dilapidated houses are lying buried deep under the present day Ahar. They say that It was Bhim, one of the five Pandavas, who, in a fit of anger, turned this piece of land upside down as a result of which the whole town of Ahar was buried underground.

Today we went to Shri Awantika ji to pray to the goddess to bless my younger son Sanjaya with a son. We were five members of the family. We had with us none from any other family. It was my younger son who was driving the car. So we did not have anybody whom we could regard as an outsider. In other words, it was a homogeneous group of five persons having almost the same eating habits, speaking the same language, worshipping the same gods and goddesses, and harbouring the same ideals. But was it so? Let us wait to know the answer.

My husband is usually lost in his own problems and has little time to spare for the problems I present before him. When I ask him what he has to say to me, he usually replies, “Do as you like.” Often I have to say to him angrily, “If I had been able to solve the problem, I would not have come to you for advice.” It is then that he realises the seriousness of the situation and turns to me to ask what problem I am talking about.

Today is the first day in my life when I am with the family and yet nobody has been provided a meal since morning. Ever since I joined this family as my husband's wife, my first concern has been to cook for the family and I have never (barring today) allowed any member of the family to leave home without eating or carrying with him food for the whole day. Nay, I do not let even an uninvited guest go until I have provided him at least breakfast, but generally food enough for the day. There have been occasions when I had to prepare meals for the people I did not like at all. But I did that in spite of my not having any liking for them. And many a member of the family appreciates the fact. Why did I not cook anything today, then? Am I ill? No, I am hale and hearty. Is there scarcity of anything in the kitchen? No, there is God's plenty. God has given me everything in abundance. Yet all of us are without meals today.

It has been a practice in our family that if somebody has to go out of station, food is cooked for him definitely by the time he/she is ready to leave home. Be it summer, be it winter, or be it the season of rains, the rule remains unbroken. When we go to Awantikaji I get up around three o'clock in the morning and prepare food in about an hour and a half so that we may reach the bank of Shri Gangaji to have a holy dip at, or not much later than, sunrise.

After we have prayed to the goddess at the temple we dine, take rest for an hour or so, do purchasing and try to reach home latest by sunset. There were the days when my mother-in-law used to play the leading role in all this. She was glad to play the hostess and all the rest of us behaved as her guests. In course of time came my turn. I remained true to this tradition of the family for several years.

But you know the old order changeth yielding place to new. Today too I was awake at 3 A.M. I wanted to prepare meals for the members of the family. But this time Sanjaya's wife was the leader. After all it was she with whom we were going to Shri awantika ji. So she was the hostess, and Sanjay's father, Parvati and I were her and Sanjaya's guests. So it was her duty to cook for us all. She cooks for herself and for her husband every day. Today she was expected to cook also for all the three guests of

hers. At least she should have given us the lead. She should have, at least, entered the kitchen and started doing something there. I would have joined her immediately and would have done the rest of the work. But the lead was to be given by her. If I am somebody's guest I shall never go into the kitchen to cook for myself unless my hostess at least pretends she wants to feed me. I cannot ask for food so long as I am a guest. The invitation has to come from the hostess or the host. Unless it is there I am not going to eat even if food on the dining table has been brought from heaven.

Even today I got up, as I have already told you, at 3:00 in the morning but instead of going into the kitchen I remained in my bed waiting for Moon to go into the kitchen. I waited for about fifteen minutes silently. At about 3:15 I started coughing to indicate that it was time to start the kitchen work. But there was no sound from Moon's room. After another fifteen minutes I came out of my room and opened the door of the bath-room to take my bucket from there. But Moon remained unaffected. At about 4:00 in the morning I left my bed with the intention that I would start cooking. “After all it is my family. Don't I cook for them every day?” said I to myself. But what came to my mind was that even if I started cooking, Parvati, my elder daughter-in-law, would, no doubt, join me, Moon was not going to join me at all. “She does not leave her bed before seven in the morning. Sometimes she comes out of her room at eight. I can tolerate this on the other days, but how can I tolerate this on the day she is our hostess? It is she who is going to pray to Shri Awantika ji to bless her and her husband with children.”

I went back to my bed and did not leave it until it was five when we were scheduled to board our car for the temple of Shri Awantika ji. Sanjaya's papa asked me whether I had prepared lunch for all, but I announced that ample food was available in the market at the temple. We took our respective clothes, put them in our respective bags, put the bags in the hind part of the car and took our seats in the car. And Sanjaya started driving. By the grace of Shri Awantika ji we reached the temple only a little after sunrise. First we paid our regards to Shri Ganga ji, had dips in the holy waters of Shri Ganga ji, and then went into the temple to pray. When we had prayed we thought of eating food.

I had thought that we would be able to have our lunch at some hotel at Awantika ji temple. But to my surprise I found there was no hotel at the temple; there were only a few tea shops. So we had to remain satisfied with tea and very light refreshment which was available there. I was

feeling guilty for the whole family's remaining without lunch. But nothing could be done at that stage. We thought we would be able to find some hotel at Jahangirabad and have lunch there. But we reached Jahangirabad at about 3 p.m. and by that time no food had been left with the hotels we approached. I said to myself, "Ballo, it is your mistake that the whole family is almost on fast today."

I hoped to have meals available in some hotel at Bulandshahar. We took an hour to reach Bulandshahar but there too we were told they would be able to provide us meals at about 8 p.m. So there was no point in waiting there. And when we reached home at about 6 p. m. all of us were really hungry.

Sanjaya's papa was the first one to go into the kitchen. He took the basket containing vegetables and started peeling potatoes. I took my sieve and turned to knead the flour. And everybody else turned to do this or that. So the lead which had to be taken by Moon in the morning was taken by Sanjaya's papa in the evening! I was feeling terribly guilty. But was Moon too feeling guilty? I do not know.

✠✠✠

REIMBURSEMENT

It was, if I correctly remember, in the year 1979 that I received a letter inviting me to inspect an intermediate college in my home district. Those were the days when the Education Department of Uttar Pradesh used to arrange a panel inspection of an intermediate college every third or fourth year. Usually the task of inspecting these intermediate colleges was entrusted to teachers teaching in degree and post-graduate colleges or to teachers working as Principals in intermediate colleges. On receiving the invitation I sent my consent to the Director of Education assuring him that I would reach Manujsena on the appointed day.

I was teaching at S.S.V. Post-graduate College Hapur then. One of my fellow inspectors was teaching at N.A.S. College Meerut. And the third member of the panel was teaching at D.A.V. Post-graduate College Muzaffarnagar. The head of this panel was the District Inspector of Schools of Bulandshahar.

I travelled to Manujsena in a bus that was overcrowded. But I did not mind the crowd. After all they were the people of my home district. The road was dusty. But I did not mind even that. It was in this dust that I had played in my childhood days. It was the month of December and the week-long cold wave that visits the northern part of India every year had arrived and had made the whole of north India severely cold. But I did not mind even that and reached the college at the stipulated time. Shivering with cold we started the inspection work. In the afternoon it began to drizzle and the mercury of the thermometers fell down considerably. The quilt provided to me in my bedroom was not adequately thick. So I had to request them to arrange a blanket too, otherwise I might have caught pneumonia.

When the three day inspection work was over, we addressed a joint meeting of the managing committee, teachers of the college and the students. We were expected to convey our views about the educational activities in the college and give our suggestions. After we had done that we bade good bye to everybody and left for our homes.

The travelling expenses of my journey from Hapur to Manujsena and back were to be reimbursed by the government of Uttar Pradesh. I had spent Rupees eighteen on this journey. So I submitted a bill for Rs. eighteen to be reimbursed by the Government of Uttar Pradesh. This bill was to be passed by the District Inspector of Schools of the district of Bulandshahar. Then it was to be passed by the Treasury Officer of Ghaziabad. Then it was to be passed by the Sub-Treasury Officer of my town of Hapur. And then the payment was to be made to me by the State Bank of India, Hapur branch. This meant that I was required to travel to Bulandshahar, at least, once, and to Ghaziabad too at least once. These two journeys were going to cost me more than eighteen rupees. So there was no point in trying to get payment for this bill. But I resolved to go ahead and to try to get this money.

I resolved to utilize the services of a friend, who worked at Bulandshahar, to get the bill passed by the District Inspector of Schools of Bulandshahar. This is how I saved a day of mine and some money.

But to Ghaziabad I had to go myself. I reached the Treasury office even before 10:00 a.m. so that the official there might not find an excuse for not disposing of the bill that day. It is quite common not only in India but also in Yemen for officials not to dispose of a day's work that very day. Many of them find excuses for postponing it for the next day. Perhaps this was so in Shakespeare's England too for this Elizabethan dramatist complains against the practice of people's postponing things for the next day when he says in *Macbeth:* "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow…"

So no sooner did the concerned man arrive, than I submitted the bill for its early disposal. The man looked at the bill. It was just one leaf. He looked for its companion and finding nothing attached to it asked me, "Where is the B.M. 9?" Now I recollected that a bill was to be accompanied by one half of a leaf with B.M. 9 printed on it. I cursed myself for having forgotten that. I feared the man would send me to the office of the District Inspector of Schools Bulandshahar to get the B.M. 9 too to be signed by that official. But I heaved a sigh of relief when he himself supplied me a B.M. 9 and was satisfied with my having filled in all its columns.

The man scrutinized the rest of the bill and also the B.M. 9. He appeared to be satisfied, but he said, "This is O. K. Come to the office tomorrow to collect it." This was the sentence that I did not want to hear and as I have already said I had reached Ghaziabad early in the morning

so that the clerk might not utter anything having this meaning. But in spite of all the cares and precautions of mine I heard this hateful sentence. I was hot with anger. But I calmed myself and tried to persuade him with these words: "Sir, if I have to come tomorrow again I shall have to apply for one more casual leave and will have to spend as much money as I have spent today. Please take as much time as you like but do pass it today." I did not hope him to relent, but by the grace of God he relented and agreed to dispose it of that very day.

When I went to him to collect the bill at the stipulated time, he said, "I have passed the bill. Pay me money for my labour."

I was asking for the reimbursement of the money I had already spent on travelling to the place where the government of Uttar Pradesh had asked me to go. The money that I had spent was nothing beyond the bus fare. I had done the whole of the paper work they wanted me to do for the purpose. Yet I was being treated as if I had committed some crime. What else did they want me to do? But there was nobody to whom I could go with my grievances.

And I had to say to the official, "How much money should I pay you?" He asked for five rupees. I paid him the money and got the bill. There were two more offices where I was supposed to go: the sub-treasury of Hapur and the State Bank of Hapur. I was not sure what kind of officials I was going to face there.

So I took an oath that day that I would never again go to inspect any intermediate college of Uttar Pradesh. And I have been true to my oath till today.

✠✠✠

THE HAVOC THAT A MONKEY CAUSED

It was a summer morning. At about eight o'clock a man came to me to inform me that Than Singh's son had met an accident and had died then and there. I left my work where it was and rushed to Than Singh's residence.

Than Singh had been a student of my friend Dr. Ramesh Chandra. While studying Geography for M.A. degree Than Singh had come into close contact with Ramesh Chandra and Dr. Chandra had initiated him into leftist political thinking. It was as a result of this initiation that Than Singh had become a sympathizer of the working class. Nay, he had started organizing the textile workers of Pilakhuwa into trade unions. His efforts had borne good fruit and some unions of the workers had come into existence in spite of the resistance of their employers. But Than Singh had not been able to get a job by that time. So he had no independent source of income.

However, when his wife got a job as a teacher in a primary school he felt much relief as now he was assured of getting some money regularly for his family. Whether he was being supported by his parents at that time is not known to me.

Than Singh was the father of one daughter and one son. The daughter was about eleven years old and the son was about eight years old. Both were school children. Than Singh had been happy with these two children of his and since he did not want any more, he had opted for vasectomy and had got himself sterilized thereby.

When I reached Than Singh's house, I found his daughter bewailing inconsolably. While trying to console her Than Singh too was crying. He was on the ground just at the door of his house. Ramesh Chandra was telling people the details of the accident and was narrating to them how Than Singh's son had met the tragedy. Comrade Yashpal, the Ghee merchant, was busy in making arrangements for the last rites of the deceased boy. Some woman, perhaps Than Singh's wife, was bewailing inside the house. What I was able to gather from Dr. Chandra's narration is being given in the next two paragraphs.

"There came a monkey up Than Singh's roof and it was feared it would take away clothes up the roof and would tear them to pieces or it would steal away guavas and bananas in the kitchen. So Than Singh's son took a stick to drive it away and went up the roof for the purpose. He must have thought that it was very easy to drive away the monkey and that the moment the monkey saw him with a stick, it would run away just as a dog or a cat does. So the boy reached upstairs and raised the stick to hit the monkey. But a monkey is not a dog. It is neither timid nor straightforward in its dealings. Even if it does not want to attack its adversary and intends to go away in case it is allowed to go undisturbed, it pretends to be bold enough to counterattack especially when it finds the adversary staring at it. It expresses its resentment both by producing a frightening sound and by showing its terrifying teeth. At such a time a timid man cannot help staging a retreat.

"So when Than Singh's son raised his stick to hit and pretended to be very aggressive, the monkey opened its mouth, produced a frightening sound with its velum and threatened to counterattack. In face of this threat the boy could not help moving backward with a jerk. He was not aware of the fact that he was very close to the edge of the roof and that if he moved even a step back he would have no part of the roof under his feet. So when the boy tried to move backward he fell from the roof in the courtyard of his house. As the floor had been made firm with bricks and cement, the back of the boy's head was badly injured when he fell. He was rushed to the doctor but the latter declared him to be 'brought dead'."

I turned to Than Singh but his grief had overpowered him so much that he was crying like his own daughter inconsolably. The man whose thunder transformed the capitalists of the area into rats was weeping like a girl from whom valuables have been snatched by a burglar.

Since what had happened could not be undone we started making preparations for the last rites of the boy. Since the boy was only eight years old it was decided that the body would be consigned to the Mother Earth rather than to the flames. And it was done.

Several months passed unnoticed. But the push that the monkey had given to the course of incidents was still in action. One day Dr. Chandra told me that Than Singh had been ailing for weeks and that the doctor's diagnosis indicated he was suffering from tuberculosis. There used to be a time when tuberculosis was a fatal disease and one who got infected by tuberculosis was sure to die in a year or so. But it is not so now. So I told Dr. Chandra that the disease was no longer incurable. But Than Singh

had lost, Ramesh Chandra told me, interest in life and had lost the will to survive. The death of his only son had been too severe for him to bear. Not long afterwards one day Ramesh Chandra told me that Than Singh had breathed his last a few days before, leaving behind no male member in the family. Alas! this was the second death caused by the monkey's threatening posture. It also was the death of the last male member of the family.

In case Than Singh's son had resolved to feed the hungry monkey when it came to his roof, as per the ancient custom among the orthodox Hindus, maybe the history of the family would have been different.

✠✠✠

THE PRICE I HAD TO PAY TO GET MY BOOK BACK

Ranjeet Singh. Yes, that was his name. In 1951-52 he was a student of class seven studying in a school not far away from ours. Both of us belonged to Lakshyapuri, a village in the district of Bulandshahar. Ranjeet's father owned an agricultural farm. Two of his uncles too were agriculturists. One of his three uncles was a teacher of Mathematics teaching in Ranjeet's school. Ranjeeet's family, or rather his grand-father's family, was considered to be one of the two super-powers of the village. This family was loyal to the British rulers of India even when Mahatma Gandhi's movement had become popular throughout the country. In Lakshyapuri this was the first family which had been attracted towards the British system of education which had been introduced in India as a result of the acceptance of Macaulay's notorious (?) 'Dispatch' by the government of Britain with the result that many persons from this family had been able to get government jobs and had enriched themselves considerably.

One day Ranjeet told us that he was in need of the Sanskrit text book of his class as he had to learn the forms of some Sanskrit nouns, verbs, and pronouns. Since his examination of Sanskrit was not far he needed the book that very day. I pitied the man as if he belonged to the class of the have-nots and lent him my book on the condition that he would return my book the following day. I was glad to be of some use to the man as he was a fellow student of mine. I regarded the boy as my friend and believed it was my duty to help friends. Or, maybe, I was trying to gain a friend. That might have been the reason why I deemed him to be one of the have-nots though the agricultural land which his father owned was many bighas more than the land we owned. In his own eyes he belonged to the class of the haves.

In those days I used to trust people and accepted as truth whatever they said. I did not know that many people were not true to their word and did much different from what they said. After I had lent Ranjeet this book of mine I was told I was not going to get back this book and that it had become

the property of Ranjeet. But I did not agree with those persons. I thought I was being terrorized/ incited for no valid reason. Ranjeet was a boy who addressed even me as a brother and had a ready laughter on his face. As a matter of fact he usually laughed as soon as he had made an observation and made funny remarks quite often. His observations were full of gibes. So I believed him to be a humorist rather than a swindler. I also believed Ranjeet had little love for books and would like to get rid of his own books if he could. I believed Ranjeet tried to befriend people as I did.

When we met the next evening Ranjeet said his work had not yet been completed and that he needed my book for one more day. When I said I too needed the book, he said he had forgotten to bring the book that day and that he would definitely return it to me the following day.

The third day he did not turn up at the appointed time. We were about half a dozen students who used to come back from our schools usually together almost every day. But he did not turn up even the fourth day. Now I began to suspect that the man really had a design not to return my book. The persons who had told me I had committed a mistake in lending Ranjeet my book, now told me they had judged Ranjeet more correctly than I had. I too felt I had been duped by this boy and feared I was really not going to get my book back. This feeling made me desperate.

When we met again I asked Ranjeet to give me my book back as so many of his promises had gone unkept. He said he had attended the school that day after a gap of several days and had forgotten all about returning me my book. He added that he would definitely return it the following day. There appeared to be truth in what he was saying but I also suspected that he was again making a lame excuse. I said I too needed my book and that he had kept it with him for several days though he had assured me he needed it only for one night.

"I need my book today. Give me my book now," said I.

"How can I give you your book now? It is not with me, I have left it at home. Am I a magician that I can get a book from the air? I am telling you it is at home. If you do not believe me you can search my satchel," said he.

I was in a mood to relent as he said everything in a very convincing manner. But when I heard his sentence that I could search his satchel, I got a new idea and decided to do what he himself had offered.

"Yes, show me your satchel," said I.

On hearing this sentence of mine, Ranjeet thumped a heavy blow of his fist on my right (?) temple. I felt dazed for a couple of minutes and took several minutes to understand what had happened and why so many stars had appeared before my eyes all of a sudden. When I touched my temple I found there a protrusion on the rise. Might be some vein of mine had burst and blood had started flowing out fast.

By this time Ranjeet had flung my book at me and was moving homeward murmuring that I thought he would eat my book.

Today it is the 24th of January 2013. Ranjeet died several years ago --- I have heard. I am thousands of miles away from Lakshyapuri. We shifted to Jahangirabad in 1965. Lakshyapuri must have changed considerably since then, I hope.

✠✠✠

THE TREATMENT I CHOSE TO UNDERGO

It was 1997, if my memory is not cheating me. I was invited to attend a meeting of a Selection-cum-Promotion Committee by Jyotiba Phule University of Bareilly. Since I had to reach Bareilly at about 10:00 o'clock in the morning I left Nainital at about 5:00 a.m. It was at Bareilly that I had my breakfast. After the meeting was over the father of one of the lecturers requested me to have lunch with him. In spite of my repeated refusals he insisted on my at least accompanying him to the hotel and I had to agree. The meal served there, according to him, was of good quality but I found one of the vegetable-curries stale to the extent that it had become sour. I did not want to hurt Saxena's feelings by revealing the fact to him and ate even this up.

The result was that by the time I reached the bus-stand it had had its adverse effect on me: I felt so weak that I was finding it difficult even to walk. I decided then to catch a bus for Hapur, rather than for Nainital. When I boarded the bus I felt so much tired that I found it difficult even to remain sitting and I had to lie down. Fortunately for me the bus was not crowded and the other passengers in the bus were accommodating enough not to object to my occupying a seat meant for three passengers. Even when I reached Hapur I was lying on my seat.

When I reached home I was feeling so weak that I did not feel like going to any medical practitioner and went straight to bed. The next morning too I was not feeling well. I went to an Ayurvedic medical practitioner Dr. Sukhvir Singh, however. His diagnosis was that I was suffering from acidity and he gave me allopathic medicines in the form of capsules. I took complete rest for a day or so and next day left for Nainital. By that time my condition had become worse: I had burning sensation in my food pipe; I had pain in my stomach; I was suffering from loose motions; and I had cough too.

First I went to Dr. Mowar. He advised me to get my blood and urine checked, to get my chest x-rayed, to get the photographs of my stomach through the ultra-sound technique and to check my weight regularly to find out whether I was losing weight consistently. He also asked me to

measure my temperature four times a day and to show the chart to him regularly. It was evident that he had not been able to pinpoint the ailment I was suffering from but he prescribed medicines and I started taking them in an obedient manner. After all I had full faith in the allopathic system of medical science and told myself that all the tests were an essential part of the game. Thus I spent about three thousand rupees on the tests. When I was carrying the x-ray report to Dr. Mowar, Dr. Adhikari, a friend of mine called me and took the x-ray from me to express his opinion about my lungs. He saw the x-ray and said, "Yes, it is there." Perhaps, he meant to say that my lungs had caught the infection. But when Dr. Mowar saw the x-ray he said that my lungs were O.K.

Dr. Mowar was a very busy doctor and was able to devote to a patient only seconds. Our University too had a doctor who came to the University two days a week. So I decided to consult him too. I found Dr. Pant a very sympathetic person and he started treating me. Since he was an allopath he prescribed allopathic medicines. Perhaps he took the problem of loose motions first. His medicines had a soothing effect on that disease, but intensified other problems. Fever too developed after a few days. When he turned to fever, the problem of loose motions returned in a more severe form.

One day when I went to Dr. Pant's room in the hospital, I found Dr. Rawat sitting there. I showed my papers to him and gave a short account of the ailments I had been suffering from. He prescribed another medicine. I bought this medicine too. It was given to me in the form of white tablets. I took this medicine with the result that the next morning I found both my feet swollen. This was a new problem. I was upset considerably and immediately went to the hospital to consult Dr. Pant. He was there in his room and when I showed to him my swollen feet, he too felt upset and advised me to go to Dr. Mowar immediately. He asked Susheel's mother to bring a medicine from the chemist and to administer it immediately. He also said that I should agree to get hospitalized in case Dr. Mowar advised me to do that.

When Susheel's mother went to buy the medicine from the chemist I was sitting under a tree inside the hospital premises. A friend of mine happened to come there. He looked at my face and said that there was swelling on my face too. I had been told in my childhood days that if swelling reaches a male human being's face he is sure to die and that if swelling reaches a female human being's feet, it is impossible for a doctor to save her. My mother's feet too had received swelling at least a fortnight

before her death and all our efforts to make her recover had gone fruitless. The memory of this occurrence made me feel I was very close to bidding good-bye to the world! However, I smiled at the idea a little later.

Susheel's mother brought me the medicine from the chemist. I ate the tablets with the result that I had to go to the urinal soon afterwards. Then I went to Dr. Mowar. I showed to him Dr. Pant's prescription and also my swollen feet. He said, "At Nainital further investigations are not possible. So I would advise you to go to some medical college." That means all these doctors were still trying to know what I was suffering from! What were they trying to cure me of ?

"To which medical college will you advise me to go?" asked I.

"You may go to Sanjaya Gandhi Medical College, Lucknow," said Dr. Mowar.

I left his room and came back to Dr. Pant. He advised me to go to Meerut Medical College instead, as it was close to Hapur and I might get the help of some relatives there.

This made it clear to me that these two doctors of Nainital had, in their own ways, declared my disease incurable and had lost, I felt, all hopes of my survival. I was suffering from several ailments no doubt, but all my organs, barring my food pipe and stomach, were functioning very well. I was not feeling any abnormality in any other limb of mine. Both my mind and my heart were functioning normally. The swelling on my feet had been caused by the medicines Dr. Rawat had prescribed. In other words, it was a reaction of the body to what the medicine was doing, So I did not foresee any threat to my life at that stage. And I concluded that these two doctors had failed to diagnose my disease and that in spite of that they had been prescribing medicines on the trial and error basis. So what I stood in need of, at that moment, was a correct diagnosis. I was moving slowly from the anteroom towards the gate of the hospital. I had decided that I was not going either to Lucknow or to Meerut. I had heard of another good doctor named Dr. Sah. He was a private practitioner. I had heard a man speak highly of his capacity to diagnose diseases correctly.

I reached Dr. Sah's clinic. He was available there and he examined me instantly. I suggested to him that perhaps I was suffering from dropsy, as it was this disease that was being talked about a great deal those days. He prescribed a few medicines and I started taking them. I found them effectual as the swelling on my feet started diminishing quite fast and

very little of it was left the fourth or fifth day. However, Dr. Sah said he did not trust the reports of the pathologists of Nainital and that he would like me to go to Haldwani to get my blood, urine and the like tested by the pathologists there. He said he wished the money that was going to be spent on the tests again to go waste, but he would definitely like me to be rechecked thoroughly by the pathologists whom he trusted. He added that there were no symptoms of dropsy in my case.

This meant that Dr. Sah too had failed to diagnose the disease I was suffering from and had treated me just by the trial and error method. In other words, he was not different from Dr. Mowar and Dr. Pant. I felt I was being hoodwinked by these allopathic doctors. If they did not know my disease they should have refrained from giving me medicines. Symptomatic treatment may be given for a day or so but continuing this treatment for weeks is unpardonable.

I decided to go to Hapur and consult the Ayurvedic medical practitioner Vaidya Laxmi Narayana ji there. I recollected I had had this kind of problem a few years earlier too and it was this medical practitioner who had cured me completely in three to four days.

On my way to Hapur I stayed with Susheel at Pantnagar and he took me to Dr. Tripathi. Dr. Tripathi examined me and his diagnosis was that I was suffering from some cardiac disease and he too wanted me to go to Meerut Medical College to consult the heart disease specialist there.

Both Susheel and Ajaya wanted me to go to Meerut Medical College. I refused to agree with them. Susheel felt helpless but Ajaya tried to use a little force too to persuade me. I told them that I had resolved to undergo Ayurvedic treatment at that stage.

I went to the Kanhaiyalal Dharmartha Ayurvedic hospital where that practitioner used to work. Vaidya Laxmi Narayana was not there and his place had been taken by another, named Vaidya Ram Pal Sharma. I stated my problems to him. He heard me patiently and said that I was suffering from two ailments: there were blisters in my oesophagus and there was deficiency of iron in my body. He added that the blisters were responsible for the burning sensation in my chest and the deficiency of iron had caused the swelling on my feet. He charged two rupees per day for the medicines he gave me. One of the medicines he gave me was *lauha bhasma*. And within about a week I was hale and hearty again.

I happened to meet Dr. Pant in the collectorate of Nainital when I was back there. He was wonderstruck to find me hale and hearty. He knew

that I had not gone to Lucknow or Meerut. He had asked some colleague of mine and from him he had learnt that I was very much in Nainital. He told me that the swelling on my feet had led both Dr. Mowar and him to conclude that both my kidneys had stopped functioning. I told him that the Ayurvedic doctor of Hapur had given me treatment for two ailments, namely blisters in my oesophagus and deficiency of iron. Dr. Pant was all praise for this Ayurvedic doctor of Hapur. After an hour or so we again met on our way to the University. I was carrying a chair to my house after getting it repaired. Dr. Pant was surprised to find me carrying so weighty a load without any difficulty.

✠✠✠

THREE SONS: THREE WAYS

Chhajju Mal had three sons: Keshav, Ram Chandra and Pramod. He knew the value of education and its role in making one's life successful. So he tried to educate his sons as well as he could. His village Sampoorna Nagar was so insignificant in the eyes of the government that they had not opened even a primary school there. So for their primary school education these children had to go to a school in a neighbouring village named Khadanpur a mile away. For secondary education they were sent to a secondary school in another village named Dararpur about four miles away. And for higher studies they were sent to the towns and cities far away from their village.

Soon after getting the Master's degree Keshav got a job as a lecturer in a Post-graduate college of Jahanabad. Since Jahanabad was not very far from the village Keshav continued to visit his village frequently, though he had shifted to Jahanabad. He continued to be a part of the family as he was before his getting this job. All the other members of the family continued to live together: Chhajju Mal continued to be the head of the family and Sugandha, his wife, continued to be the sole treasurer of the family. Divya, the wife of Keshav, tried to bring it home to her husband that she too needed money in order to take care of the children as it was essential to feed the children properly and adequately, and if they had no money for the children they should not have brought them into existence. But Keshav turned a deaf ear to her suggestion.

The income of the family now included the earnings of Chhajju Mal as well the earnings of Keshav. Consequently, the family was in a position to provide better education to Ram Chandra and Pramod. Education was not very expensive in those days but for a person having little money even the cheapest thing is expensive. No doubt father's financial state plays an important role in deciding how educated the children will be. But that is not the only factor behind one's getting educated or remaining uneducated. It is not uncommon to find that a millionaire's son is illiterate while an orphan has been able to get even higher education.

Ram Chandra had little interest in books. All his father's efforts failed to make him a studious person. He was able to pass the High School examination, no doubt, but he refused to study any further. He resolved to become a businessman a few years after he had served the government of India as a soldier. He joined the field of transport when he bought an ambassador car and started transporting people from one place to another. He shifted to Mayapur not much far from Delhi, the capital of India.

But after he was married he tried to dissociate himself from the family and distance himself from its traditions in the sense that he made his wife Laxmi his treasurer. This created tensions in the family. His step was liked neither by Chhajju Mal nor by Sugandha. Chhajju Mal was a staunch supporter of the joint-family system and advocated for it as and when he could. He called a joint family a broom tied together. So he tried to persuade Ram Chandra that he should contribute whatever he could to the income of the family. But Ram Chandra refused to be persuaded and told his father that he was not being able to save anything at all as the prices of petroleum and diesel oil were considerably high. When his father reiterated his advice, Ram Chandra produced cash receipts from the petrol pumps and his bank to prove that whatever he got from the passengers was being spent on petrol, mobile oil, payment to the bank and the maintenance of the vehicle. Chhajju Mal was helpless.

Pramod was able to get better opportunities for higher education. When he was a college student, the family was able to pay him handsome amounts of money every month with the result that he was able to live in the boarding house just as rich men's sons did. He was able to have different kinds of dresses for different occasions and move in a circle of rich friends. He earned a master's degree in Science and got the job as a junior lecturer.

When Pramod got married he too made his wife Roopvati his treasurer. Now there were three treasurers in the family. This disturbed Chhajju Mal a great deal. He used to assure himself that Pramod would not prove as selfish as Ram Chandra had turned out to be. But when he saw Pramod behaving like Ram Chandra behaving exactly like Ram Chandra he felt disappointed. However, he tried to give himself a hope that he would succeed in persuading Pramod to continue to be a part of the family as Keshav still was. Moreover, he felt Pramod was not as bad as Ram Chandra even though he was fashionable. Chhajju Mal tried to give himself the hope that Pramod, unlike Ram Chandra, would not

produce cash memos and bank receipts to prove he had no savings.

So one day when Pramod was back from Mayapur, where he now lived, Chhajju Mal decided to try to persuade him that it was not appropriate for him to distance himself from the family. What transpired between him and Pramod was something like what follows.

"We do not want you to give us your whole salary as Keshav does, but you can give us whatever you are able to save," said Chhajju Mal.

"We are not able to save anything at all," said Pramod.

"If you are not able to save much, you can give us just five paise that you are able to save. One gives much more than a five paisa coin even to a beggar when one is approached," said Chhajju Mal.

"Why should I give you five paise ? My money is for me, not for anybody else," was Pramod's reply.

Chhajju Mal was shocked to hear these words of his youngest son whom he regarded as his dearest. He said to himself, "So for Pramod I am not his father but an 'anybody else'!"

This is how came to nought all plans of Chhajjumal to keep his family united!

✠✠✠

WAS IT RIGIDITY? OR HONESTY?

Ramesh Shukla, a student leader, came to me one day and said: "Sir, this boy is seeking admission here to M.Sc. Botany. Please phone to Professor S.P. Singh to give him admission."

"Are admissions not being given in the Botany Department according to the Admission Rules of the University?" asked I.

"Sir, admissions are being given on the basis of merit. But this boy may not get admission if the rule of merit is followed strictly. That is why I have come to request you to phone to Professor Singh. Please say to him that this work is to be done," said he.

This made everything clear: the boy did not hope to get admission on the basis of his merit and so he was in search of a jack that might enable him to get admission. Shukla had offered to help him and the two had come to me. Shukla must have thought that my recommendation was a trump card in this case. I wondered that Shukla had the temerity to ask me, the head of the Campus, to become corrupt enough to recommend his case to a subordinate of mine. In other words he wanted me to make one of my subordinates, who was acting in accordance with the rules of the University, violate those rules, which I had framed, and give him admission. Obviously the boy was either a knave or a fool. If he knew the implications of what he wanted me to do, he was a knave. If he did not know them and was making a request to me just because he was helpless he was a fool.

"Shukla ji, I have framed the admission rules and admissions have to be accorded or denied in accordance with them. If the admission work in the Department of Botany is being done in accordance with them, I am happy and there is no need for me to interfere. If the admission rules are being violated in some Department, let me know and I will right the wrong," said I.

"Sir, the rules are all right. They are there in the Prospectus. Let them remain where they are. The rules are meant to serve man; they are not there for man to serve them. Man is the measure of all things. I want you just to phone to Professor Singh that he should consider this case. Don't

say anything else; say only this much that he should consider the case of this boy," said he.

"If a boy has applied for admission, his case will automatically be considered. There is no need for me to say that this case or that case be considered. My phoning to a functionary of the Campus would mean that I want something to be done in violation of the rules. That is something that I do not want to happen. That is why I will not phone to Professor Singh. It is as simple as that," said I.

"Sir, this is how you create enemies and that is why the Campus is full of your enemies You should help people and they will help you. Otherwise, you will be left alone," said he.

"Shukla ji, what matters is that admission work is done in a fair manner. Whether I am left alone or have a large following does not matter. I am not above the rules. I do not want my word to prevail; what I want is the rule of rule to prevail," said I.

"Sir, if you say to Professor Singh that he should just see this case, our problem will be solved," said he.

"I know this sentence of mine will solve your problem, but it will create problems for me. I am here to solve the problems of each and everybody and they can be solved only when things are done in accordance with the rules," said I.

"Sir, you are making a mountain of a mole-hill. This boy has come from Gorakhpur. Have pity on him," said he.

"Shukla, you are asking me to do something that I should not. And since this is something that I should not, nothing shall make me do it," said I.

"Sir, an administrator has to be flexible. One who is rigid fails as an administrator," said he and left my room.

A student leader has his eyes fixed on just one single thing, namely votes in the elections he is going to contest, just like Arjuna who had his eyes fixed on the eye of the toy-bird which his teacher Dronacharya wanted him to pierce through. So he tries every acquaintance or perspective supporter of his to get entry into the University irrespective of the rules of the University, laws of the land and the ethical rules prevailing in the community. In order to achieve his end he can do anything: he can spend efforts, time and even money to win friends and to keep them, he can shout at his teachers, and he can try to give the

impression that it is he who makes things happen in the University.

In the University I was serving the student leaders had a prolific growth and every third student was a student leader. The day a boy became a student leader he began to feel he had gained the privilege of speaking loudly, entering any teacher's room without seeking his permission, and treating the employees of the University as his obedient slaves. The president of the students' union regarded himself as the owner of the university free to make anything happen in it.

In that university there were held elections for the offices of the students union. They elected their president, vice president, secretary, joint secretary, and treasurer. A day before the polling the contestants were invited to address a gathering of the students. Most of the contestants said that the university was being administered very badly and each of them assured the hearers that in case he was elected he would set things right. Since I was the Director of the campus, I was the chief target of their attacks. And I had to be on the dais to see to it that there was no disturbance at all. I had to sit like Patience on a monument smiling at grief.

That year too the day of speeches arrived. The students gathered outside the New Arts Faculty building. The contestants started coming and giving speeches. Ramesh Shukla too was invited to speak and address the gathering. He reached the rostrum and turned to the audience. He said: “O.K., friends, as a teacher Dr. Krishna Prasad is God Himself, but he is not a successful administrator. We want our Director to be a dynamic administrator rather than a rigid one. In case I am elected I shall see to it that a dynamic person is appointed Director so that the problems are solved easily.”

I smiled all the charges away leaving the teachers and the students to come to their own conclusions. I also tried to convince myself that nobody took the speeches seriously and that facts spoke more loudly than tongues. However I was wrong because Ramesh Mishra took Shukla's speech seriously and said that he agreed with the boy. On hearing him Dr. Bisht remarked, “You are Ramesh and so is Shukla!” May be there were many more who agreed with Shukla.

✠✠✠

WAS MY MONEY NOT HARD-EARNED?

Amar was the apple of my eye. It was natural for me to arrange for him not only what he wanted but also whatever else I could. Being the youngest of my sons he also received his elder brothers' affection a great deal, and during his school and college days he received money not only from me and his mother but also from both of his elder brothers. As a matter of fact both of his elder brothers gave him money quite lavishly as they tried not to let him face any of the financial hardships they had had to face when they were students. So Amar's student days were very happy: he was able to join the best college available, he joined the best (=most expensive) hostel of the college, he dressed himself according to the latest fashion, and he maintained a standard of living at least not inferior to anybody else's in the hostel.

However, he was not able to spare much of his attention to his studies during his college days with the result that he was able to get just a second class in both the graduate and the post-graduate classes. His prime concerns in those days were garments popular with fashionable people, his rich friends and the comforts of the hostel life. The hostel life had taught him the value of being richly clad and he started evaluating people on the basis of the dresses they wore. Nay, he looked down upon people whom he found ordinarily clad.

Usually he took two years to complete a one year course. It had been so at least in two cases: he took two years to get through the 12th class examination, and he took two years to complete the B. Sc. Part I course. In no examination did he get first class.

I believed that a joint family was able to make its presence felt in the society and that a nuclear family was doomed to remain obscure. So I tried to persuade my sons not to think of moving out of the shelter of the joint family. So long as my sons were in schools I was the only earning member of the family, as my wife Kiran was just a housewife. However, I had made my wife treasurer of the family, and whatever I earned went into her purse first.

When my eldest son got a job and became an earning hand, he did not

break the system and Kiran continued to be the treasurer of the family. Kumar, this eldest son of mine, was a married man and had his own family to take care of, but he gave all his earnings to Kiran and if he needed money he had to request Kiran to give him money. I was happy we were still a joint family. So long as Roshan, my second son, was unmarried, he too treated Kiran as the treasurer of the family, and gave all his savings to his mother. But when he was a married man he discontinued the practice and gave to his mother no money at all. I tried to persuade him not to try to change the ways of the family but he replied he was not able to save any money at all. I had declared him incorrigible long ago and never expected anything worthwhile from him.

Roshan's example was followed by I Amar too: so long as he was unmarried he handed over his savings to his mother, but when he had a family of his own, he kept all his earnings to himself. Amar had had higher education and I expected a decent behaviour from him. As a matter of fact I expected him to strengthen the ties which had been keeping the family together. So I tried to bring it home to him that it was his duty to see to it that the family did not break. I said, "By the grace of God you are well placed and are getting a handsome salary. So you are in a position to spare some money for the family and keep it united."

"Living in a city like Meerut is very costly. How can I save anything at the moment?" said he.

"Saving just five paise per month should cause you no problem I think. Do at least that and contribute at least five paise to the income of the family", said I.

"But why should I give my five paise to the family? My money is hard-earned", said he.

There the negotiations broke. What could I say on hearing this sentence of his? His money was hard-earned! Yes it must have been. But was my money not hard-earned? However, I did not ask him even that. A son has a right to say anything to his father; but a father's rights are limited! O Gosh!

✠✠✠

WILL THE TWAIN EVER MEET?

Santosh had gained the Master's degree in English and was in search of a job. Finding a job in India in those was an uphill task. And the days when one is unemployed are so bad for a young person that he does not like even to recollect them later. They are bad because in those days one appears to be a burden on the earth wanted by nobody and one does not know what to do to oneself. There are moments when one thinks of even committing suicide. Many a time a young man loses patience and resolves never to attend any interview at all in future. If he has land he becomes an agriculturist, and if he gets a shop, he becomes a shopkeeper.

During his college-days Santosh prided himself on his being a good student and had assured himself of having a bright future. In those days he had heard of the problem of unemployment, no doubt, but it was, for him, a topic to write an essay on. Now it was not a topic to write an essay on, but a problem that was standing face to face with him and demanded the earliest possible solution. And there was no solution in sight.

Santosh had been a student of Science up to his graduation. It was after becoming a graduate that he had shifted to English literature. And he had done so at the suggestion of his father. His father Kishori Lal was a Lecturer in the Department of English in a post-graduate college. Kishori Lal had advised Santosh to join M.A. English because in that area he was in a position to guide Santosh up to the Ph. D. level. He also thought that if Santosh did Ph. D. he would get the job of a lecturer in some university or college. He had a hope that by the time Santosh completed his Ph. D. some post would fall vacant in his college itself.

But when Santosh got the M.A. degree and started looking for a job, Kishori Lal found that in his college there was no vacancy in the Department of English. “What to do in such a situation?” asked he. Even in the neighbouring colleges there existed no vacancy.

By this time the degree of M.B.A. had become everybody's craze. Every graduate appeared to be joining this Business Administration course. Santosh too heard of it and decided to try his luck. He not only applied for admission in a Business Administration college but also got

selected. This proved that Santosh definitely had an aptitude for Business Administration.

Businessmen in India are usually, though not always, rich. That is the reason why, perhaps, there has come into existence an adage that it is in trade and commerce that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, resides. Moreover, a businessman remains independent and does not have to appear before Selection Committees to get appointed and promoted. Nor has he to wait for a Pay Commission to recommend that his pay-scale be revised and a few more chips be paid to him. He studies the conditions prevailing in the market and keeping them in view lowers or raises the prices of his goods. One day Kishori Lal heard Santosh telling a peer of his that business was the field in which one was able to make use of one's brilliance and creativity as it was with the aid of these two that one was able to make a room for oneself in the business world, while teaching was a routine affair in which there was nothing for brilliant people as a teacher's role is that of a transmitter transmitting knowledge from the past to the future. At the most he is a bridge between the old generation and the new one.

This led Kishori Lal to feel that Santosh was more interested in business than in teaching English. Kishori Lal's second dream that his son would teach English in a college began to fade in the light of this observation of his. His earlier dream that his son would become a scientist had shattered long ago.

However, Kishori Lal wanted his son to choose a profession in which he might be able to make use of his knowledge of English, as well as his knowledge of Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics. He also wanted the profession to be a lucrative one. He thought over the problem and came to the conclusion that dealership in television sets was a profession of this kind. He had seen Sethi, the tea-stall man, move from rags to riches and become a millionaire in a short period of hardly ten years through this dealership. He knew that Santosh had studied Electronics at his graduation level. So he suggested to Santosh one day that he might open a television shop as in that business he would be making use of his education too.

As a matter of fact nobody knows what is in store of future for us or for ours. We make plans of one kind but the outcome often has little to do with these plans. It is often said that one can move in the right direction in case one knows oneself. But it is easier said than done. Who knows himself in this world? We make theories for ourselves every day and

have to reject them within a few days if not on the same day. A man sends his son to study Economics but the boy becomes a novelist. Another man sends his son to study Physics but the son becomes a politician. A man gets the degree in medical science but he becomes a governor.

****

About thirty years later one day Santosh was in his drawing room. He was about fifty now and was himself a father. He was a professor teaching English in one of the Central Universities of India and had earned much fame as a professor. Now he was advising his son which road to choose in case he had two before him. His son Pallav was close to completing his education and had taken a decision exactly according to the guidance provided to him by Santosh. Santosh was telling his son which road was going to lead him to which destination.

"I do not want to impose my views on you. I have simply explained to you what you are likely to get in case you join the Institute of Bank Management, and I have also told you what you can gain and lose in case you continue serving the ESSAR Company as an engineer. The explanations and clarifications are mine, the choice is yours. Don't blame me if you find your choice to be wrong in future. I remember I did not do what my father wanted me to do. Do you know what my father wanted me to become after I had done M.A. English?"asked Santosh.

"What did he want you to become?" asked Pallav.

"My father wanted me to open a television and radio shop and become a shop-keeper. And he wanted me to open this shop because his radio, an old Philips Philatina, was usually out of order," replied Santosh.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Pallav.

"Yes, he actually wanted me to become a shop-keeper. If I had accepted his advice, I would have been repairing old radios and connecting broken connections with a welding tool in my hand. Thanks to Professor T. R. Sharma! He advised my father to send me to the university to join the M. Phil. course and to do Ph. D. and then I joined the University and got an opportunity to find the way to enter the academic field," said Santosh.

✠✠✠